

S E R M O N S

O N

EVANGELICAL and PRACTICAL

S U B J E C T S,

BY THE LATE

Rev. WILLIAM CRUDEN, A. M. *K*

MINISTER of the G O S P E L,

I N

C R O W N - C O U R T,

L O N D O N.

He being dead, yet speaketh. HEB. xi. 4.

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REV WILLIAM CRUDEN, M.A.

MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL



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L O N D O N

Printed by J. JOHNSON, Strand

1794

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L O N D O N

iv
TO THE READER.
TO THE
READER.

THE following SERMONS are Posthumous. They were not prepared by the AUTHOR, for the Press, and, on that Account, are not so full and accurate, as they would have otherwise been. The Reader, however, may be assured, they are the genuine Works of the Rev. AUTHOR, whose Name they bear.

THEY are printed from his own Notes, transcribed for the Press by two worthy MINISTERS in the Country, who have made no other Corrections than what they judged the AUTHOR himself would have made, had he prepared them for the Eye of the PUBLIC.

THEY are published (by the Consent of the MOURNING WIDOW) at the earnest Request of the ELDERS and CONGREGATION in Crown-Court, and others that were his occasional Hearers, who

iv **TO THE READER.**

are desirous that he, (though dead), may yet speak to them, and that they may have an Opportunity to read in their Families and Closets some of those Discourses they had heard with much Delight from the Pulpit.

THEY seem, indeed, calculated for Spiritual Edification. The Subjects are Great and Important, and the Manner in which they are handled, is plain, engaging, and affecting.

THAT the same divine Blessing (there is Reason to believe) attended these **SERMONS** in preaching, may be graciously vouchsafed in the Reading of them, is the hearty Desire of

3 NO. 63

THE EDITOR.

THE

THE
C O N T E N T S.

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THE BURNING BUSH.

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them: and I will make of thee a great na-
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said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot
against thy people? &c.*

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S E R.

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S E R M O N I.

EXODUS III. 3.

*And Moses said, I will now turn aside,
and see this great sight, why the bush
is not burnt.*

THE history of God's dealings towards his people of *Israel*, has ever formed a conspicuous part in the pages of the sacred annals. Here we behold a combination of infinite wisdom and grace, both in their deliverance itself, and also in the means of its accomplishment.

THE historical circumstances recorded concerning the birth, the preservation, the qualifications of *Moses*, and the arduous employment to which the Lord called him, and rendered him eminently fit, are worthy

of a more minute attention than we can now afford to pay them, and, to an attentive and serious mind, afford much occasion for useful improvement. I would therefore, at present, only advert to the situation of *Moses* at the time when he *saw that great sight* referred to in my text, and which is particularly mentioned and accounted for in the preceding chapter.

ON account of his zeal discovered on behalf of his brethren when they were in a state of captivity, we are told that Pharaoh sought to slay him, but *Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian* *. In process of time, *Moses* married the daughter of *Jethro* the Priest of *Midian*; and habituated himself to the ancient and pleasing employment (which was then also far from being a disreputable one) of feeding of cattle. And we are told, that *he led the flock of his father-in-law to the back side of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and*

* Exod. ii. 15.

behold,

behold, the bush burnt with fire, and the bush was not consumed *. This strange and unusual sight, doubtless, filled him with surprise and astonishment; hence it is added, that *Moses* said, *I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt*. In the following verses we find that God was pleased graciously to reveal himself unto *Moses*, and to give him a comfortable intimation of his designs of love towards afflicted *Israel* in delivering them from *Egypt*, and bringing them to *Canaan*.

WHAT we propose, in our farther enlargement, is,

I. To endeavour to discover some of the grand views which may be considered as emblematically represented by *the bush burning with fire and not consumed*.

II. SHEW how justly this may be accounted a *great sight*.

III. WE may remark that in order to see it, we must, like *Moses*, turn aside.

* Ver. 1, 2.

THE BURNING BUSH.

IN the *first* place, with regard to the light which *Moses* beheld, we may remark,

1. THAT the view of *flaming fire*, would serve to suggest to him the presence of the Deity.

THE appearance of *JEHOVAH*, in Old Testament times, was more than once in some such manner, and awful display of himself as this. Thus when he proclaimed himself the great Legislator, and appeared unto *Moses* on *Sinai's* holy mount, he *descended upon it in fire, and in the midst of thundering and lightnings, and smoke* *. Thus also he shewed himself to his prophets *Isaiah* and *Ezekiel*, and to *St. John*, in the midst of fire †: And in *Daniel's* striking account of the vision of the Almighty, it is said, *I beheld the ancient of days; his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him* ‡.

THE perseverance of the flame (*the bush burning with fire and not consumed*) might

* *Exod.* xix. 16, 18. † *Isa.* vi. 4. *Ezek.* i. 4. *Rev.* i. 18.
‡ *Dan.* vii. 9, 10.

denote

denote the awfulness of his offended justice, and his displeasure at his enemies: for *who can stand when he appeareth? Our God is a consuming fire* *.

THE appearance of this flame *in a bush*, might lead the thoughts of *Moses* to that tree where first the quarrel originated betwixt God and man, and the divine indignation was enkindled against sin: for as sin entered thereby, so did the wrath of God against the transgressors of his law.—And likewise, that his jealousy would continue to burn till an atonement was provided and offered up to satisfy offended justice. Well did *Moses* remember that awful threatening of the divine displeasure, *in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die*. Few minds can be supposed more deeply affected with this sight than *Moses* was; and if he *quaked* at a like appearance on mount *Sinai*, notwithstanding his familiarity with God; no wonder if an impression of his presence, and the glory of his justice should overawe the minds of other sinful men.

* Mal. iii. 2. Deut. iv. 24.

2. As *Moses* saw clearly those truths, which it was at the same time necessary he should cover with a vail from others, so another view which he might, by faith, have in this burning bush, was that green tree, that fat olive tree,—that branch and tree of Righteousness, in whom both *Jew* and *Gentile* were to trust; even *Christ* the vine, the root of *Jesse*, that root which had no form nor comeliness to them that saw him; he who revealed himself upon this occasion, afterwards, to *Moses*, saying, *I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob* *. He who was before *Abraham*; who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire †; he it was who appeared unto *Moses* as the angel of the Lord, in a flame of fire, out of the midst of a bush ‡; and whom *Moses* by faith beheld.

3. BUT the most remarkable and striking sight which the eye of faith here beheld, is that of the fierce flame of almighty wrath kindled against *Christ*, and taking hold of this tree.

* Ver. 6. † Heb. i. 7, ‡ Ver. 2,

SUCH is the commission given to the sword of justice, *awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts, smite the shepherd, &c.**

THOUGH the Levitical service was not yet prescribed, nor the paschal lamb slain;—though neither sin-offering, nor burnt-offering had been as yet offered on God's altar;—though no lamb from the fold; nor ram from the thicket had been stately slain in sacrifice;—and though, as yet, neither tabernacle, nor temple-worship was appointed; still *Moses* was no stranger to the blood of *Abel*, and the offering up of *Isaac* as types of Christ the true sacrifice, nor was he ignorant that atonement must be made by blood, and by burning the sacrifice. Christ was the anti-type of all the Jewish sacrifices, and *the lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*

THE flame continuing to burn in the bush without consuming it, might suggest the divinity that supported the sufferer while ma-

* Zechar. xiii. 7.

king an atonement for man's transgression. The same infinite power that supported the three children who were cast into the burning fiery furnace, supported the Lamb of God in that conflict he was engaged in when divine justice met him. These three witnesses for God were never cast into such a furnace before; but he who appeared *as the fourth, walking among them, like unto the Son of God **, suffered for them, before he suffered with them. He was *the Lamb slain* typically, and by divine appointment and decree, *from the foundation of the world*;—*the bush burning with fire, which Moses beheld, yet not consumed*; the atoneing sacrifice for sin; the only object of the faith, and confidence of the people of God in every age of the world.

IF *Moses* at this hour got such a key, and was favoured with God's light and truth to lead him into the gospel-mystery, his meekness is accounted for. *The meek, says the Psalmist, will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will*

* Dan iii. 25.

shew them his covenant *. If Abraham, at the twilight, was glad to see the day of Christ, how much joy must this view of him have afforded Moses as the morning of gospel-day advanced, and the clouds dispersed, beholding in this burning bush the great salvation of God's church, of which the temporal salvation of *Israel* was a faint representation? Surely he would esteem nothing too great for him to do or to suffer, in order to forward the scheme which God imparted to him, of *Israel's* deliverance, especially considering that he himself was to be honoured as the chief instrument of advancing it.

NOR need it be objected against Moses' having such views of a spiritual as well as a temporal deliverance through Christ, at the burning bush, that he did not impart this discovery, nor give such an explanation of the matter to his brethren. Our Lord also had many things to say to his disciples which they could not then bear: and it must be evident to any one who considers the state of *Israel* at this time, and the hardness of

* Ps. xxv. 9, 14,

their

their hearts, that they were also incapable of bearing those clearer discoveries of gospel light and grace which *Moses* enjoyed, and that it became proper and necessary to veil divine truth under *beggarly elements*.

4. ANOTHER sight here emblematically exhibited, was the sufferings of the church of God, represented by flaming fire.

THE *fire* and the *furnace* are metaphorical expressions frequently used in scripture to denote affliction; and this representation was strictly applicable to the state of God's *Israel*, at the time that *Moses* was favoured with this view, for they were sorely oppressed, and their lives were made bitter thro' the grievous bondage they were then under to *Pharaoh* and the host of *Egypt*.

BUT the *bush burning in this flame*, and not consumed, was farther expressive of the church's support amidst the hot flames of persecution. And this has been the case in every age of the church. A divine and invisible hand has ever protected and supported this feeble plant amidst the fiercest storms and

and fires of persecution; and ever will, for *the gates of hell shall never be suffered to prevail.*

It may be also hinted here, that as *Abraham* saw the day of Christ afar off, how easily could the same spirit enable *Moses*, through the same glass, to discern the New Testament Church, and all the flames of persecution that should be kindled against it at different periods, by pagan or papal *Rome*? If *Isaiah* so minutely describes, in the thirty-fifth chapter of his prophecy, the flourishing state of the Church of Christ, and the conversion of idolatrous nations; what could hinder *Moses*, enlightened by the same spirit, from seeing by the light of the bush, the glorious support of omnipotence that should be afforded to the suffering Church through every period of time?

5. NOT only was the sight which *Moses* beheld an emblem of the Church collectively, but also of every chosen vessel individually; and that, with respect to divine support in a season of affliction.

FIRE,

FIRE, as well as water, are figures of speech used in scripture to denote tribulation. *When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee*.* None of the trees of righteousness are exempted from their share of suffering in this fire, though they have promises of preservation and support when cast into the furnace. *Many are the afflictions of the righteous.— In this world ye shall have tribulation, &c.* Of this Moses had an early share in his own person: He was, at the time he saw this great sight, an exile in a strange land; and though late the presumptive heir of a crown, was now so distressed, as to hire himself to feed his father-in-law's flock. After forty years spent in this humble state, an enlarged scene now opens to his view, and he is called to an honourable though dangerous service. In this situation, how encouraging must it have been to him to be taught by this representation, that the persecution of *Pharaoh* against himself and his brethren, should no

* Isa. lxiii. 2.

more prevail than the fire to consume the bush! And how much his spirits needed to be supported and raised by such an intimation, will appear from his reluctance, and the excuses made when this honourable embassy was first brought forward to his view.

6. THIS view serves not only as an intimation of the *support*, but also of the *sanctification* of the afflicted Christian.

THE holy spirit is often represented by the metaphor of fire. *Baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire* *. *He is like a refiner's fire, and shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver* †. The Christian that is cast into the furnace of affliction, shall, through the purifying influences of the holy spirit, come out of it as gold or silver refined, and lose nothing but his dross. No grace was ever lost there. In every age the child of God has had cause to say, *it is good for me that I have been afflicted*.

SUCH may have been the views presented to the mind of *Moses*, as they are to us who

* Luke iii. 16, &c. † Malachi iii. 2, 3.

are favoured with the clear light of the gospel, by the event referred to in our text.

II. WE proceed now to consider how justly this may be accounted a *great sight*. And Moses said, *I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.*

IF it was a *great sight* to the enlarged mind of MOSES, it must surely be so to us, especially when that which was hid under a vail is now clearly revealed.

1. IF we consider who exhibited this sight; even the great God who does nothing in vain. It was a supernatural appearance: the course of nature seemed to be changed in order to display the glorious object of divine grace, and to awake the attention of one who was to act as important a part in life as any mere man ever did.

2. As the dawn of deliverance to the *Jewish Church* approached, it was designed to afford a bright gleam of hope, and to convey an assurance that the dark night of their affliction and persecution was well nigh spent;

spent; that God was not unmindful of his promise, and that he was about to deliver. Therefore, among the first words which the Lord, at this time, spake to *Moses*, we read the following; *I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their task-masters: for I know their sorrows, and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, &c. **

AND if we carry a translation in our thoughts from a temporal to a spiritual deliverance, we may farther add, that *Redemption*, a doctrine which is the sum and substance of all divine revelation, was here intimated. Here was the divine scheme which was afterwards to take place in the person and work of Christ, held forth, as it were, in miniature. *Moses* was a typical mediator; and the deliverance of *Israel* out of *Egypt*, which was here represented, pointed to the more glorious redemption of lost guilty sinners from the ruins of the fall (far worse than *Egyptian* bondage) through our Lord Jesus Christ.

* Ver. 7, 8.

THIS is a mystery which has been continually unfolding through every downward tract of time, and every deliverance which God has wrought out for his Church, has afforded a proof of. Every age has been illustrating God's power and purposes to save.

HERE is a sight, then, for faith and love to contemplate, not unlike that which *Moses*, upon another occasion, so earnestly desired to behold, namely, *God's glory* in the stupendous plan of the sinner's salvation thro' Christ; — that which *Simeon* enjoyed, after which he wished for nothing more under the sun.

3. WE may account that which *Moses* here beheld at the burning bush to be a *great sight*, as it was the prelude, and paved the way to a grand æra in our world; the promulgation of the law at *Sinai*; the rule of eternal righteousness; that which the surety of sinners fulfilled to deliver his people from the curse, and which he assists them in obeying as the expression of the divine will.

THUS

THUS it appears that some of the grandest events which ever took place in the universe were here represented: and there can be little or no doubt but that when *Moses* beheld this emblematical representation, he had such a view of its important and spiritual meaning, when we consider that he was under the immediate teaching of God. Neither are we to forget that *Moses* was skilled in all the learning of the *Egyptians*; of course, that he was no stranger to hieroglyphics in which they excelled; and that much of their knowledge was couched under one figure, emblem, or letter, and that they had many important significations included under the appearances of fire and flame.

III. I COME now to remark, that in order to see this *great sight*, and the truths represented by it, we must, like *Moses*, turn aside.

1. FROM the hurry of this world.

'TIS he that *seperateth himself that seeketh and meddleth with this wisdom* *. It is needful that we first retire from too eager a pur-

* Prov. xviii. 1.

suit of the transient baubles of life, and shut our eyes from beholding earthly vanities; that we retire within ourselves, and hold communion with God, in order to see this great sight.

2. FROM carnal reasoning. He who listens to its dictates, or consults with flesh and blood, will never see or admire the beauty and wisdom of God in this mystery, nor will have a heart to prize and seek after the blessings comprehended therein.

3. It is necessary also, in order to behold so great a sight, to turn aside from the gratification of the flesh.

FOR as the dust of worldly cares flying around prevents the sight, so while the bleating of fleshly lusts is attended to, there will be no ear to listen, no relish to seek after a saving acquaintance with the mysteries of godliness.

4. WE must *turn aside* also from leaning to our own understandings, and enquiring with Nicodemus, *how can these things be?*

Every

Every tow'ring thought, every proud and lofty imagination must be brought down, and it must appear as amply sufficient for our faith and trust, as to every subject of Revelation, that GOD HATH SAID IT.

I N F E R E N C E S.

1. How amazing is the depth of wisdom contained in the Scriptures! Every emblem and figure recorded in the Books of *Moses*;—all the *Jewish* services and ceremonies; all that *Moses* and the Prophets had revealed to them, and which they made known to others; whatever conduces to the glory of God in connection with the good of guilty man, is here treasured up.

2. WE infer, that if *Moses* was so desirous to see this great sight, emblematically represented to him, how inexcusable are they who have no desire after the spiritual blessings represented in this, and other parts of God's word, though they have a clue to guide them, and the holy spirit promised to them that ask, to lead them into all truth. We have not only *Moses* and the Prophets,

but the Apostles of our Lord, yea, Christ himself, the great Prophet, speaking to us from heaven. He said therefore to his disciples, *Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears for they hear; for verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them* *. The mystery which hath been hid from ages, and from generations, is now made manifest to his saints; to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you the hope of Glory †. And farther we are told, that Moses put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished, which vail is done away in Christ ‡. How inexcusable and guilty then must they be, who, with all these advantages of gospel-light, shut their eyes from beholding Christ the only Saviour, and do not seek after nor prize the blessings he makes known? *How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?*

* Matth. xiii. 16, 17. † Coloss. i. 26, 27. ‡ 2 Cor. ii. 13, 14.

3. WOULD you see this great sight? then be exhorted to turn aside from those obstacles, which have been already mentioned, which hinder the view of faith; — follow the directions which the Lord hath given you in his word? and above all, cry earnestly for the spirits enlightening influences, that thus you may be taught wonderful things out of God's law, and suitably prize the precious discoveries of his gospel.

AND may God command his blessing!

S E R M O N II.

JOHN XI. 35.

— *Jesus wept.*

THOUGH many are the astonishing views to be beheld below the sun, yet methinks none could more surprise, or so much affect thinking men, as to see the divine Jesus shedding tears! 'Tis a moving scene to behold any around us, such especially as are renowned for wisdom and fortitude, of exalted rank, or uncommon virtue, thus affected; but every comparison between the most exalted or virtuous characters that have in any age attracted the attention, and the adorable Jesus, falls infinitely short. They, at best, are but created beings; He the Creator, of whom it is said, that *he charged his Angels with folly*; and among men, who are free from sin, which,
in

in its very nature and consequences must occasion tears? But the Lord Jesus was *holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners*. What then can affect the mind if condescension like this fail to impress? The God of the spirits of all flesh became surrounded with human frailty—the source of joy, a man of sorrow.—He who wipes away tears from every eye of the saints, allows his own to run down with grief.

WHEN we reflect upon what occasion the sacred Historian informs us, *Jesus wept*, we may remark, that his tears were not excited by his own painful feelings, nor for the prospect of those sufferings which yet awaited him;—it was not the reproach and scorn of his foes, nor the unrelenting opposition and malice of the Pharisees, nor the combination formed by the Sanhedrim against him, which caused the starting tear to trickle down his furrowed cheeks—but it was at the grave of Lazarus;—yet not on account of the death of Lazarus simply considered (for he was going immediately to repair that loss, and to turn the mourning into joy, by raising him from the dead);

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rather,

rather, we may suppose, these tears flowed from a mixture of compassionate grief, and of holy displeasure, on account of the inordinate excess of sorrow, the weakness of faith discovered by those who were the friends of Lazarus, and their unbelief as to his power to deliver from death.

I. HENCE we may be led, in our farther enlargement from these words, to point out some of those things, the view of which might excite the compassionate Jesus to weep.

IN THE FIRST PLACE, Jesus, we may well suppose, wept on account of the UNBELIEF of those who had heard his doctrine, and accompanied him from place to place; who, as it were, sat at his feet, to whom he had opened his commission, unfolded his character, shewn ample credentials from heaven, and given repeated samples of his divine power. Thus we are told *, that *some of them said, could not this man which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?* Jesus viewed with

* Ver. 37.

pity and lamentation this ignorance and unbelief of the friends and family of Lazarus. They were more highly privileged than others; thither he resorted; among them he taught with the familiarity of a most intimate friend; from them, therefore, he might have expected higher advances in true religion and faith, than he found when one of them said, *Lord, if thou hadst been here, my Brother had not died* *; and again, when Jesus commanded the stone to be taken away from the grave, *Martha the sister of him that was dead saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days* †; to reprove whose unbelief Jesus replied, *Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?*

IN this ignorance of theirs, and slowness of heart to believe, were exhibited, as in a mirror, the many, yea, the innumerable instances of those, in future times, to whom the gospel should be preached by Christ's Ministers, rising early and speaking to them, but they would not hearken; of millions who should hear the gospel-trumpet blown

* Ver. 21.

† Ver. 39.

without emotion; and who should be witnesses of the many tears shed by faithful Ministers over them; whilst in strains of lamentation they cried out, *Who hath believed our report — We have laboured in vain, and spent our strength for nought have sown wheat but reap thorns — have toiled all the day, and taken nothing.* If the human heart is so hard against such impressions, that he who hath the key of David, who openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth; he in whose lips knowledge was kept; who spake as never man spake, and in whom all treasures were hid, had cause to complain, *they would none of my counsel, they despised all my reproof, ye, will not come to me that ye may have life;* what wonder is it if poor clay vessels, lamps in whom are only a few drops of oil, poor dark orbs deriving light from another, and shining with borrowed beams; if such, I say, have cause to complain that *they have stretched out their hands all the day long to a disobedient and gainsaying people,* and to confess that they never have possessed the key of knowledge when so little able to open the heart? — What wonder that the Apostles and Ministers of the Lord Jesus should

should travail in birth, and feel the severest pangs from the thought of the obstinacy and hardness of the sinner's heart; from the poor gleanings after all the seed that has been sown, and watered with their prayers and tears?

2. JESUS wept at the thought of human nature, once created after the image of God, now so degraded, sunk beneath its primæval dignity, prosecuting mean and unworthy pursuits, losing sight of that godlike purpose for which it was formed, not soaring aloft on the wings of love, or like the eagle, mounting upwards till absorbed into the glorious sun, but wallowing in low and grovelling designs: *O how is the gold become dim! how are the mighty fallen!*

To behold a grand Palace, the boast of Architecture; lying in magnificent ruins, worn out by time, or overturned by the conquering enemy, as was the Temple of Solomon, who, among Gentiles as well as Jews, could be without emotion at the sight, and more especially the Architect? — If Aholiab and his fellow labourers had survived

vived and seen the ruin of their workmanship, how many tears would they have shed at the Babylonish captivity ! what idea then may we entertain of that compassion which filled the mighty mind of him in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, when he saw his workmanship so diminished in its original lustre ? Or supposing it possible for us to see a fallen orb — a star bereft of its light,—quitting its sphere—in a ruinous state—and cast out as a wreck, what thoughts must such a sight occasion ? Or supposing us to behold a mighty Angel losing his rank in the scale of Creation, and reduced to the most low and contemptible situation in which a reasonable being can possibly be placed ; as is in fact the case with the fallen Angels ; how awful and affecting must this be to us their fellow creatures ! — what sensations, then, must the consideration of this degeneracy occasion unto Christ !

3. JESUS wept at the sight of that fatal influence and ascendancy which Satan had gained over the sons of men. If he *rejoiced in spirit*, in that hour when the Disciples told him that *even the Devils were subject unto them*
through

through his name, and when he *beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven*; doubtless, he also grieved in spirit at the sight of those strongholds which he still possessed in the hearts of sinners. — If a loyal subject, or a powerful commander should see many provinces occupied, and every creek fortified, every town garrisoned, and villages turned into strongholds to resist their Sovereign, even tho' such subject or General had assurance that they should all be reduced in the end; yet how would he grieve at the thought of that horror, devastation, and those streams of blood which would be the inevitable consequence. Such grief, may we suppose, Jesus felt, when he saw every heart garrisoned, and rendered strong, through Satan's influence, to oppose his authority and grace. Though he is *stronger than the strong man armed who keeps possession of the palace* of the sinner's heart, and knows his sheep, and has them for his peculiar charge, and will subdue their hearts to him, and all enemies to them; yet infinite wisdom well knows who shall perish in their unbelief.—If Jesus, when he beheld Jerusalem, wept over it, even after its doom was fixed, it seems not unwarrantable, nor
incon-

inconsistent with that perfect human nature he possessed, to weep, when he had that misery in his eye, to which a part of the rebellious creation was doomed. It seems to be the inseparable from human nature in perfection to weep, even with anger, against sin, its proper object of detestation and cause of sorrow.

4. HE wept at the prospect of that harvest of tares which was to spring up in the christian Church, and which the ears of unbelief then shewing themselves, foreboded. If the Apostle, who had the spirit by measure, clearly saw, soon after, the rise and progress of Antichrist which began to work; how perfect, then, must have been his view of all the poisonous plants to be brought into his vineyard; of all that baneful influence which damnable errors would produce in his church; of those deadly opiates by which immortal men were to be lulled asleep in the most fatal security till the trumpet of God should awake them to arise to judgment. And if his church and its interests were so deeply impressed on his heart before his crucifixion, surely not less so now!

His

His power and love combine to the protection of his favourite kingdom, having the danger from the world, and the tares of the enemy in view.

5. JESUS wept from the view of that harsh treatment which his Disciples were to meet with in an evil world.

WHAT love did he manifest towards them! what concern for their welfare when he was about to leave them! hear how he warns yet encourages them, *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.— In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*

OUR Lord, though he foretold their troubles, neither caused them, nor regarded his suffering people without sympathy. *In all their afflictions he is afflicted.* If he was with the three children that were cast into the hot fiery furnace, before his Incarnation, surely he is as much in the furnace of tribulation with his people now as ever. He makes their interests and trials his own, and therefore when he comes to judge the world he will

will say, *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*

IF the Lord Jesus had a perfect knowledge of each individual among his suffering people in every age ; and if to the eye of his almighty mind all that they should undergo for his name's-sake was clearly discovered, can we suppose that when the sorrowing drops flowed down so plenteously, that this extensive prospect had no share in the meltings of his heart, and in bursting open those floods of tears which never before proceeded from a celestial spring? — Shall I call it from heaven where no sorrow entereth? though it did not originate there, but in the valley of tears, yet it wrought for itself a channel, through his heaving breast.

AND though those trials, and the world's persecutions shall be sanctified, and work for the good of them that love God, yet this did not prevent the interposition of his sympathy. Though a Physician may permit, yea, advise the amputation of a limb from an only son, and be full of hope in its salutary

tary consequences, yet this hinders not the painful feelings of paternal regard. Nor would it savour either of knowledge or piety if we should object and say, *If Jesus is so affected for the sufferings of Christians in every age, why does he permit or appoint them? Why not impose restraints on the enemies of the Church by whom these sufferings are inflicted on his children?*

6. HE wept at the foresight of those divisions by which his Church would be torn, and the seamless coat rent.

COULD language have more powerfully urged unanimity on the Disciples of Christ, and their being one, even as are the Father and the Son? Could more forcible precepts have been suggested to love one another? Could any example be imagined more persuasive than his own? *I have loved you, that ye also love one another.* Who that reads his injunctions on this subject can forbear to say, *O how much in earnest was he in those admonitions! How much did the Disciples happiness depend on a sacred attention to them!* Could Jesus then foresee, without pain, the

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reverse

reverse of this spirit to spread, and his gospel eventually, as he said, to *send not peace but a sword*; and to *set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law*; and a man's foes to be *they of his own household* * ? Surely the view of these things would grieve the righteous spirit of him who was more than man.

7. HE wept at the sight of that inundation of foul crimes which should overwhelm the world, and carry religion almost quite away; when *iniquity should abound, and the love of many wax cold, and when bold infidelity should dare to prognosticate how few years Christianity could stand its ground in the world.*

IF sin be that abominable thing which his soul hateth; if to stop its progress he bowed his sacred head and died; if no part of creation can bear it, neither air, earth, nor sea; if righteous *Lot was vexed from day to day with filthy conversation, and unlawful deeds of the wicked*; if, on this account, *the whole*

* Matth. x. 34,—36.

creation is said to groan, and travail in pain together until now; what must be the sensations of the infinitely holy Creator of all? If his spirit is sent down as a spirit of supplication that Christians may mourn for sin; if he himself is exalted to give repentance, which has always sin for its object; what wonder, if, in the days of his flesh, he wept at the sight of that deluge of iniquity in the earth, so dishonouring to God, so injurious to man?

8. HE wept at the thought of those judgments which justice, and regard to his divine government rendered necessary to curb iniquity, and give check to sin; — of those vials of wrath about to be poured out in order to convince ungodly men that there is a God who judgeth in the earth; of those wars which the wrath of man through ambition would kindle, and deluge nations with blood before wisdom interposed to restrain their fury. He every hour surveyed the unbounded prospect of those evils which sin occasioned, and which divine judgments rendered necessary to check and punish; and when the whole map of the scenes of

time lay unfolded before him ; each revolution pointed out human miseries delineated ; every family and individual upon earth marked, to be visited with pestilence, famine, or sword ; what wonder, if the bowels of his compassion were melted at the affecting prospect ?

9. MAY we venture to say, that *Jesus wept* from the foresight of the terrors of the great day of the Lord ; of the tempest of Almighty wrath ; of the preparations made in Tophet ; of immortal creatures being set up as the butt of all the batteries of his vengeance opened against them ; of the universe resounding with that voice louder than sevenfold thunder, *depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels* ; of the opening of the flood-gates of divine wrath ; of fixing the seal of eternity on the doom of impenitent sinners ; of the smoke of their torment ascending up for ever and ever ; of their everlasting destruction ; of the worm that dieth not ; of the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone ; and of that, though to us, incomprehensible punishment, everlasting burnings.

II. WE

II. We proceed to shew that if Jesus Christ wept, it becomes the Christian to sow in tears.

THERE are many reasons which may and ought to draw tears from our eyes, some of which are peculiar to us as sinners, and therefore could not influence the holy and innocent Jesus. As

1. OUR forgetfulness of God, and sins against him. What the Lord said to his sinful people of old is applicable to his professing people now; *Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee; know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of host **.

NONE but an enlightened mind will feel this charge, and such cannot but be sensible of its force. If we know any thing of the evil nature, and dreadful ingredients of that unbelief which is a departure from the living God, how would we mourn before him!

* Jer. ii. 19.

What bitterness of soul would it occasion! Surely he who knows the plague of his own heart; whose eyes have seen his iniquity, cannot want matter for sorrow and grief!

2. OUR barrenness under the means of grace calls upon us to sow in tears. The Lord may not have waited so long, nor had so much patience towards others, as to us. Many a barren fig-tree has he already cut down; though we, alas! cumberers of the ground, have been spared still! Though we have enjoyed seasons of grace, and some have had showers from heaven, and seasons of refreshing to their dry and thirsty souls; yet are there not others, enjoying the same means and privileges, who still continue barren and unprofitable; and we are on this account, this day, called upon before God to weeping and to mourning.

3. BECAUSE of that contempt of the ever blessed God; that slight of precious CHRIST; that insult offered to the holy SPIRIT of God by others around us.

THEY

THEY who feel for the honour of GOD, and regard his authority, when they consider these things, will say with the Psalmist, *Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because transgressors keep not thy law.* Such will be the practice of those who fear God, and imitate the Lord Jesus. The Lord describes the character and conduct of such, and stamps them with his approbation, when he says, *Go thro' the midst of the city, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof **.

THOUGH every one has cause sufficient to look inward, and is called principally to sow in tears for sins personally committed against GOD; yet, since sin as sin, and wherever found, is the object of divine detestation, mourning because of it, becomes therefore unavoidable by all who fear and love GOD. If sin, as such, includes hostility and enmity against God, they who have a regard for his honour, will mourn on account of it, whether discovered in themselves or in others.

* Ezek. ix. 4.

THE slight put upon a precious Redeemer will also be matter for lamentation by all who love and follow him.—To see him despised and rejected of men; to reflect on the open blasphemy, and the avowed contempt wherewith his adorable name is treated; on the different sects which, under pretence of reverence to him, have attempted to pluck some of the brightest jewels from his crown, denying the divinity of his person, the perfection of his work of redemption, and their obligations to his free and unmerited grace; these things cannot but be grievous to those who love his name, and rejoice in his salvation.

IT will cause such to mourn likewise, that the SPIRIT of GOD is grieved, by which Christians are sealed unto the day of redemption. Such as are sensible, by happy experience, of his divine operation by which they have been brought from darkness to light, must feel sorrow for the insults offered to the Holy Spirit, which have provoked him not only to restrain wonted comfort from his own people, but to say to the world at large, *My Spirit shall not always strive with*

with man. — Hence, restraints being taken off from the minds of desperately wicked men, iniquity abounds and has set up its throne; vile men are honoured; good and evil have changed names; religion has become the subject of ridicule; truth is exchanged for error, and the power of godliness is so rarely to be found. Hence the work of conversion is so much at a stand; times of refreshing from the presence of GOD with-held; GOD withdrawn in a measure, and yet but few enquiring where they may find him. O, Sirs, 'tis good always to dwell where GOD dwells, and the reverse when his spirit departs, or even suspends his wonted comforts!

WHO, therefore, among us, is suitably affected on these accounts? Where are the mourners in Zion whom Jesus pronounces *blest*? — to whom he hath promised to give *beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness*? Surely, to adopt the words of the Psalmist, *They that sow in tears shall reap in joys. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious*

precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him *.

I N F E R E N C E S.

1. HERE we are called to contemplate one of the most solemn, serious, and affecting views that ever the universe beheld.

IF one scene is more grand than another; calculated to attract the attention, and rouse the admiration, here it is: He who was more than man; humanity in union with Godhead, feels unfeigned sorrow, is well acquainted with grief; and weeps tears of compassion for the miseries of the fallen, guilty creature, man; himself without iniquity, no guile in his lips; yet came to take away sin by the offering of himself.

2. DID Jesus weep whilst clothed with human nature, and dwelling in our sinful world? How justly then may man's present situation be denominated a vale of tears! As man enters the porch of life with tears, so with many they are scarcely dried up during

* Pf. cxxvi. 5, 6.

their whole passage through, till the hand of death unlocks the gate which leads the Believer to endless life.

How unsuitable, then, to man's present condition, and to our Lord's example, is the indulgence of carnal mirth! Though godly sorrow has the sanction of his blessed example, yet we find no instance in him of the former spirit. Through the whole history of his life he appears to have been equally remote from sullen moroseness and from unseasonable levity. When he *rejoiced in spirit*, it was when the power of his authority and grace began to display itself towards sinful men. — Go to now, ye rich and ungodly men; ye who are the slaves of your own lusts; ye sons and daughters of this world's pleasures, who *sport yourselves with your own deceivings; weep and howl, for your miseries that shall come upon you. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness; for of your laughter, we may say, it is mad; and of mirth, what doth it?*

BUT on the contrary, is there a day approaching when the Christian's present sorrows

rows shall be exchanged for endless joys? When mortality shall be swallowed up of life? — Let the thought encourage him to bear to up under present trials, and to rejoice in his future prospects. *God shall wipe away all tears from his eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall be any more pain, when the former things are passed away.*

3. THOUGH the Believer, while upon earth, must in conformity to his suffering Lord, sow in tears; like him also, he has cause to *rejoice in spirit*.—To the real Christian there are many springs of comfort, and sources of consolation opened in this vale of sorrow. Rejoice, Believer, that your name is written in heaven;—rejoice, that God has called you by his grace;—rejoice in his precious promises; in his delightful ordinances; in his spirit's working upon your heart; in an interest in his power; and in the hope of eternal life.

S E R M O N III.

R O M A N S VIII. 22.

*For we know that the whole creation groaneth,
and travaileth in pain together until now.*

THIS verse, in connection with the three former, has occasioned much perplexity and difficulty to Commentators to unravel the true meaning of. Much learning and criticism, and I may add unprofitable conjecture, has been employed upon this subject.

It is not my design, at this time, to enter into this labyrinth; or to detain you from what I more immediately propose to make the subject of our meditation from these words; referring such who wish for a more critical investigation, to the authors who have treated on the subject.

It

It is sufficient for our present purpose to remark, that the Apostle refers in the context to, *the sufferings of this present time*, and to that subjection to vanity and misery which the creation at large more or less experience, as the bitter fruits of man's apostasy and disobedience; at the same time that he leads our thoughts forward to a glorious approaching æra of deliverance, at the restitution of all things, *in the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness*, and where the power of the curse shall be known no more.

CERTAIN, however, it is, that we have now presented a different state of things, both in the animate and inanimate, the rational and the irrational creation, from the original order in creation, as well as from that scene which shall one day open to our admiring view, when, as the Apostle intimates, *the Creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the children of God*.

BUT it is the *present* state of things to which the words of our text chiefly confine our attention: *for we know*, says the Apostle, *that*

that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. In enlarging from these words, we shall,

I. ATTEND to some evidences confirming the Apostle's assertion, from our own *observation* or *experience*: the former will refer chiefly to the inanimate or irrational creation; the latter, to what we meet with, or what passes in our own minds.

II. WE shall point out some of the causes of this *groaning*, or grief. And then,

III. SHEW what grounds the Christian has, in the midst of all, to be *rejoicing in hope*.

I. THE Apostle tells us, *that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.* He represents the human race loaded under the pressure of the heavy burden of sin and misery, distressed and pained, like women in labour, earnestly looking for the season of their deliverance; and even the inferior creation oppressed under the burden of the curse that is laid upon them. Yea, all things, whether animate or inanimate, may be said to share in the general distress,

1. LET

1. LET us observe the state of the inanimate and visible Creation.

THOUGH our world is stored with rich abundance, and with all things needful for the use of man; and though it evidently appears to be the work of an Almighty Creator, a liberal and generous benefactor; still there are marks of devastation and ruin in it.

How admirable is its structure! Its foundations how wonderful! Its wide extended firmament—its towering hills—its mass of waters—its tremendous rocks and unfathomable caverns! These things discover the work of infinite wisdom, magnificence, and grandeur, though in ruins. When we view the glorious luminary of heaven, (so often mistaken for, or substituted in the place of Deity) with all the countless train of stars; or when we cast an eye over the face of this earth; its hills and vallies; its fields and flowers; the variety that charms, and the fragrance that refreshes; we see indeed wonders that nonplus the brightest intelligence, and yet we see not what must have been the original plan, before *the creature was made*
subject

subject to vanity. We see now an earth waxen old; worn out with tillage; refusing frequently to yield beyond a scanty allowance; and man eating of its produce with the sweat of his brow. We see or read of the scourge of famine visiting a guilty land; of devouring earthquakes; jarring elements; and desolation spreading abroad.

2. BUT these are the inanimate parts of nature: if we advance a step farther, we shall see the lowest animals in nature attesting the Apostle's assertion, that *the whole creation groaneth, and travaileth in pain together until now.* The reptile tribes; the smallest or most despicable of air, earth, and sea, seem to be subject to the common lot of man, having their respective diseases, and smarting under the wanton cruelty of the rest of their species; and innumerable others, like the fishes of the sea, destroying and devouring one another. If we pursue our researches through the various tribes of creatures that come within our notice, how often does it happen that they feel, and groan beneath the scourge of war, famine, or pestilence inflicted for the sin of men! How

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many are exposed to the snares laid by their unrelenting enemy man, so that neither wings nor strength avail to escape! How many of the brute creation are the slaves of his drudgery, not even suffered to enjoy the benefit of that rest which their Maker, who careth even for oxen, ordained both for man and beast! In what clime, even civilized and christian, does not the firmament resound with the groans of the brutal race, even the most useful and necessary part of them, and most subservient to the purposes and profit of man? If *he* disregards, their cry is surely heard by the Lord God of hosts. Thus, on whatever side we turn our eye or our ear, we cannot but be affected with the melancholy sight or sound of some living creature oppressed, the miserable prey of wanton cruelty: and as it is painful to the Christian to be surrounded with those who are the enemies of his God, and speak evil of his best friends, it is also far from pleasing to a humane mind to see and hear the workmanship of his God suffer pain around him.

3. THAT

3. THAT part of creation which the Apostle has in view in our text, and which we are especially to consider, is the rational or human, even the posterity of apostate Adam, whose condition by nature is that of wretchedness and misery. Who is there of our sinful race that is exempted from the tear of woe, the sigh, or the groan; seeing the truth of that scriptural declaration daily verified, that *man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble*, yea, that he is *born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward*? Who is there of our race without cause of groaning, whose inheritance is sorrow, whose passage is through the valley of tribulation and of the shadow of death? Man gives the first intimation of his entrance into life by his cry, and many are the causes of his weeping through every succeeding period of his life. If we consider the two exactly opposite characters of the sinner and the saint, we shall see that though the causes of their sorrow be different, each are led, at times, to groan being burdened.

THE man that is a stranger to religion is not exempted from his share of sorrows and

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groans.

groans. He may, it is true, laugh and mock at the idea of godly sorrow, pronounce that to be enthusiasm, and make the Christian his ridicule and his song: but is even this man without his burdens and complaints? Without his share of worldly cares, anxieties, and disappointments, such as no prudence can foresee or prevent? Does not a guilty conscience also at times wound his peace? And thus, owing to the distresses or disappointments which he meets with from without, or the uneasiness which he feels in his own breast, is not his soul at times pierced through with many sorrows?

BUT the Christian's groans are, perhaps, the loudest of all, though, in one sense, he has far less occasion for sorrow than the other character. Hence he is said to *sow in tears*, and to *go forth weeping* *. The new birth is not without groaning any more than the first. The earnest cry of the awakened sinner is, *Lord, save or I perish—What shall I do to be saved?* And when he looks by faith to Jesus, whom by his sins he has pierced and crucified, he *mourns and is in bit-*

* Pf. cxxvi. 5, 6.

terness,

ternefs, when he reflects on his sins, the murderers of his compassionate Saviour. 'Tis true, the Christian's sorrow is blended with joy; *gladness is sown for the righteous*, yet it is watered with tears of penitential sorrow. As the root is often black and uncomely, while the flower or fruit is fair and fragrant, so the grief and mourning which is felt in the penitent's breast, generally produce settled tranquility and *joy in God thro' our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom he hath received the atonement*. But this leads me,

II. To point out some of the causes of this *groaning* or grief.

THOUGH sinful men are prone to roll *sin as a sweet morsel under their tongue*, yet there is no truth more clearly ascertained than that his own sin and folly are the spring-head of all those griefs, and miseries, and burdens on account of which *the whole creation groaneth, and travaileth in pain together until now*.

It was sin that disturbed the quiet of God's creation immediately on its entrance into
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the world; marred its beauty, and defaced its lustre: then the heavens grew black, and nature put on a sable gloom. This then is the bitter fountain from whence flow all the streams of sorrow which are in the world, whether they branch out into the distinct streams of the *troubles of life—sense of guilt, or a despair of mercy.*

How many have their cup of sorrow filled with earthly troubles! To how many are wearisome nights appointed through bodily pain and sickness—the loss of friends, of property, or character! The wheel has rapidly turned round, and laid their honour, credit, and reputation low in the dust.

BUT, far more deep is that sorrow which arises from a wounded spirit. When the Christian hardly knows how to forgive himself those acts of sinful rebellion which he would still hope God has pardoned; when he looks back on a life squandered away in pleasureable and sinful follies;—its vigour gone, and its spirits wasted unto the dregs. O how pungent is his sorrow when he remembers how many choice opportunities
he

he has lost of honouring God, and profiting the souls of men! If a Parent, he mourns, it may be, over a wicked child, who, thro' his bad instructions and example, is gone beyond recovery, or continues to live, hardened in wickedness, and going on from bad to worse. Or, he may have to lament over this or that neighbour or friend, his companion in iniquity, whom he tempted or encouraged to sin against God, but who is now summoned to appear before his awful bar.

WHAT constant occasions for sorrow does the Christian also feel on account of his ingratitude for all the spiritual benefits he has received at the Lord's hands! How does he abhor himself, as in dust and ashes, when he reflects on the treachery and vileness of his heart, and that he so evilly requites the mercies of the Lord! When he reflects also on his coldness and want of zeal in serving the Lord, and attempting to advance the interest of the Redeemer's kingdom! When he first gave up himself to the Lord he thought no temptation should ever influence him to swerve from his attachment to the

best of causes and of masters ; but now he feels and laments on account of *an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God*.

THE Christian grieves also to think that his Redeemer should see so little of the travel of his soul ; that the interests of his kingdom are so little attended to and promoted in the world, and so few *enquiring the way to Zion with their faces thitherward*, while the empire and usurpation of Satan are so much countenanced, and industriously promoted. He grieves to think that so many precious souls should be so lightly esteemed by themselves, or by too many of those who have the ministerial charge over them ; that every earthly toy and pleasure should be put in preference ; that sin and Satan should be so cheerfully attended to, while God and holiness are neglected and despised.

HE groans also to think that he should have gained so little ground after such struggles with spiritual enemies — that he should toil all day and night, and still find his corruptions gain ground, and marr his peace and comfort.

WHAT

WHAT distress of mind does the raw convert feel, and the sinner who first begins to seek the Lord, and to return unto him! Though he entertains a gleam of hope concerning his state, yet his mind may be kept in painful doubt, whether his change is any other than what the hypocrite or formalist may experience: or the sight of sin as that accursed thing which God hateth, may flash terror to his mind. Under such a deprefure, he *groans being burthened*; and he reasons within himself in some such manner as this, *Can it be that a heart so hard, so cold, so wandering as mine should be a partaker of regenerating and sanctifying grace? Can I find mercy at so late an hour, since I have consecrated all my days past to the service of the Devil? Would not such a hope breed presumption in me, and security to others in the ways of sin?* Such are the painful distresses of the mind which sometimes have caused the poor trembling sinner to groan and fear, and cry out with the Prophet, *O that my head were waters, and mine eyes fountains of tears that I might weep, &c.*

BUT

BUT this brings me

III. To shew what grounds the Christian has, in the midst of all, to be *rejoicing in hope*.

THE sinner, though he has cause to grieve and to fear, yet has none to despair. There is a door of mercy opened in the gospel of CHRIST, and he is invited to *turn to his stronghold as a prisoner of hope*. And with regard to the believer, though he may be *cast down*, yet *he is not destroyed*, for he is warranted to indulge a *good hope*, and to enjoy *everlasting consolation through grace*. To animate and revive the spirits of such under all *the sufferings of the present time*, let me urge them to reflect on the glory which shall e'er long be revealed.

CONTEMPLATE the glorious prospect beyond the grave which Christianity has opened—the fruits of rich and eternal grace—floods of glory bursting upon the redeemed of the Lord—happiness unbounded—fields of knowledge enlarged—the flame of love spreading thro' all the inhabitants of heaven—joys

—joys possessed, *unspeakable and full of glory*. Conceive of all this, yea, infinitely more than this, if you can, and say, what should be the temper of creatures who are warranted to call God their Father, and all this boundless and eternal bliss their purchased inheritance through the blood of the Lamb? — Away then with sorrow and despondency.—What can empires, or the emperors of this world bestow, compared to these rich gifts of righteousness and eternal life which God bestows upon the heirs of promise in and through JESUS CHRIST the Lord? We cannot find out more powerful and animating motives to joy and rejoicing, than what a gracious God, and the prospect of an eternity of boundless bliss in heaven can convey. There, no violence can rob the Redeemed of the Lord of their enjoyments—no accidents destroy their peace, nor time impair their happiness. If the effect be answerable to the cause, the Christian's joys shall be firm and unshaken as the promise and throne of God. Though he is not yet in possession of his inheritance, yet God is his present portion, in whose presence and favour, as in heaven so on earth,

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is *fulness of joy*. He has now the works of GOD to delight and instruct him—the providence of GOD to guard him—the SPIRIT of GOD to comfort him—the promises of GOD to strengthen him—the power of GOD to uphold him—the love of GOD to influence him, and all the divine attributes engaged to do him good—all grace to give and forgive—to succour and deliver. What room is there then for the groans of despondency and despair? Rather, is there not abundant room for complacency, exultation and triumph? In what difficulties can the Christian be involved in which he may not expect help? To what solitude banished where he can be deprived of the presence of his GOD? To what darkness or shadow of death can he be brought, and not delivered from by the arm of Almighty Power? What can he behold in heaven or in earth that does not speak the Almighty Perfection of its Maker? Or to what region carry our thoughts that is remote from his inspection? Secure in his divine presence and protection, the Christian ought to rejoice evermore, trusting in the fulness of his power, and the greatness of his love.

STAND

STAND forth, then, O desponding soul, look round thee, and consider the glory and mercy wherewith thou art surrounded, and which CHRIST in his gospel and promise opens to thy view, presenting thee there with more than crowns and empires.—Embracing by faith these realities, as applicable to thine own state and condition, will make thee truly happy. GOD is your Father reconciled in CHRIST—his love is engaged to bless you—his providence and presence to attend you. He whose presence fills the universe is intimately present with you, not in his works alone, but in himself. He numbers the hairs of thy head. He is the life of thy life, and the constant spring of all thy motions. He considers thy frame: pities thine infirmities, and pardons thy sins. The sufferings he lays on thee are so many instances of mercy, and your pains are the infliction of a parent desirous of your happiness, to advance your best interests, and to promote your salvation.

SEE heaven opened, and the angels of GOD descending to guard you:—yea, the Son of GOD himself, from the bosom of the
 Father,

Father, to live and die for you. The Almighty, the Infinite, the All-gracious God, the God of love, is your present inheritance; and eternal ages of happiness are your reversion. What can be conceived great or glorious that is not in God? See his glory flowing out through innumerable channels — behold it painted on every object in nature; and reflect, that this glorious God is the God you adore, your faithful unchangeable friend.

THE eyes of all wait upon God, and he openeth his hand, and filleth all things living with plenteousness; or he denies what his creatures wish, to make them more sensible of their dependance, and to put a greater value on his blessings: afflicting only to heal; destroying with no other design than to save; and hiding his face for a moment, to make happy for ever with the light of his countenance.

HERE let us stand, and attentively survey the region of boundless bliss; the fathomless undeterminable ocean of eternal happiness; the sphere and residence of almighty love,
and

and the habitation prepared for all God's adopted children. Must we not then cry out with the Psalmist, *O how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee, before the sons of men!* *

SUFFERINGS, indeed, must, under the present constitution of things, and temper of the world, be the good man's lot. Opposition is what he is taught to expect from, and to make unto the enemies of his God, and his own soul. Life itself is a warfare, in which every Christian has his post of service and of difficulty allotted him;—a corrupt nature to subdue, self to deny, and spiritual enemies to conquer. Duty and conscience point one way; inclination and interest lead another; so that we are called, in many instances, to renounce a present pleasure; to brave danger, and the displeasure of man, to welcome pain, and to *resist unto blood, striving against sin*. Duty must have difficulties attending it, or there could not well be evidence of obedience. We could give no proof of our sincerity in the cause and

* Pf. xxxi. 19.

service of God, had we nothing to do or to suffer. The duties of trials to which the Christian is called, should be cheerfully submitted to as a regimen prescribed by his great Physician for the health and preservation of body and soul. The sorrows and afflictions he is subject to, are the strokes of love, the wounds of a friend. Who then can murmur or complain that such a hand afflicts him? 'Tis true, the external sense may ach, and nature groan in distress, but what a sweet relief to the afflicted mourner, how it mitigates pains, and causes to sing in the furnace, to be assured that it is love which inflicts, piercing only to heal, and casting *down* to relieve and recover the patient! And under all the sufferings of the present life, the afflicted believer may say with the Apostle, that *he reckons that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed* *.

* Rom. viii. 18.

IMPROVE-

IMPROVEMENT.

1. How malignant must the poison of sin be which has occasioned so much distress over God's creation! How much should it be the object of our abhorrence! How earnestly should we seek after deliverance from its condemning and tyrannizing power! Wherefore,

2. How thankful should we be for the remedy and antidote against sin, which God hath provided! And how desirous should we be to wash by faith in the fountain of a Redeemer's blood opened for sin and uncleanness! The infinite wisdom and grace of Jehovah have devised a powerful antidote against so pernicious a poison, not suffering it to rage, as might have been expected, without remedy. *In CHRIST we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of grace*.*

3. WHAT a source of consolation is it to reflect that the Christian, under all his sor-

* Ephes. i. 7.

rows and distresses, does not groan unpitied ! In his GOD compassions dwell. *Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.* And he hath anointed one to bind up the broken-hearted, and to pour the oil of consolation into the wounded in spirit; one whose ear is ever open to the groanings of the prisoners; to sooth, to relieve, and to save the afflicted soul.

LET the Christian, then, dry up his tears of grief and despondency. — *Lift up your head with joy, for your redemption draweth nigh:—’tis ripening apace to its final completion.* Your souls, believers, are already delivered, and soon your bodies also shall be redeemed from the power of the grave, and you shall be admitted into the presence of GOD where there is fulness of joy, and to sit at his right hand where there are pleasures for evermore.

BUT how dreadful the state of those whose sins are not pardoned ! Their souls shall feel the force of divine vengeance, of unavailing and eternal sorrow. *Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish, &c.*

S E R-

S E R M O N IV.

HOSEA XI. 4.

*I drew them with Cords of a Man, with
Bands of Love.*

IN this chapter, God is referring to his compassion and love towards his people of Israel, and their ungrateful and rebellious conduct towards him. *When Israel was a child, then I loved him. — I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them. I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love, and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them.*

As God's operations in a way of grace are uniformly the same in their nature and

tendency, we may consider the words of our text as applicable to God's saving grace on the soul, and to those who are the subjects of that grace.

I. THEN we shall shew what is implied in *drawing with the cords of a man*. And

II. THAT *the bands of love* are the proper and suitable cords which the Lord uses in drawing sinful men.

I. *I drew them* (saith the Lord, referring to his people of Israel) *with cords of a man*.

THERE is an evident distinction between *drawing* and *dragging*. Irrational creatures are forced along by the spur or goad, as being incapable of other treatment; but a reasonable creature is still more powerfully stirred up to action by the use of suitable arguments and rational persuasion. He is possessed of an inward principle of motion, determination, and choice; and can hold a court, to examine every proposal, and judge of its propriety, before carried into execution, and to approve of every step before it
be

be taken. This was Adam's original and happy condition: and, were we in that precise state wherein God at first placed us, then moral suasion would be, of itself, sufficient to draw every man; so that if once his duty and interest were fairly set before him, nothing more would be wanting to influence his choice. But does it need to be proved, that through man's original apostacy, and its consequences, the faculties of the soul are so disordered that they cannot properly perform their functions without superior aid? In spiritual concerns, the understanding is darkened, the will perverse, the affections misplaced. It becomes necessary, therefore, to have the heart of stone taken away, and a new heart and a right spirit imparted; to have the dark understanding enlightened, and the wrong biases removed. That drawing, then, spoken of in the text, is attended with the restoration of the enfeebled and lost powers of the soul.—And *the cords of a man*, by which the Lord is represented as drawing sinners, may denote his making use of such affecting, powerful, rousing considerations as are wont to put men in motion, and to stir them up

to action, in a way agreeable to their nature; and his accompanying these with a divine influence and energy, when he draws the hearts of sinners effectually to himself.

1. ONE cord by which the Lord God draws sinners to himself, is his exciting in their minds an apprehension of danger, and a desire to flee from the wrath to come.

NOTHING is more natural than for every creature to endeavour to run from, and escape danger. Even the brute creation are directed by this powerful instinct, self-preservation being one of nature's laws. The reason why men are unalarmed with all the threatned miseries of God's wrath, and hell's pains, is not that they are not moved at the thoughts of danger, but because they have no affecting belief that they are in such dangerous circumstances. Were their houses to take fire, or the plague to come nigh their dwelling, you would soon see fear, and a desire of preservation give wings to their feet, because they discern the approaching evil. But, while in their unconverted state, they discover no desire to
flee

flee from the wrath to come, because their minds are blinded, their hearts are hardened, and they are insensible that they are the very persons exposed to this wrath. This shews the need of a divine conviction, of God's enlightening the eyes, arousing the conscience, and drawing the sinner.

WERE reason, indeed, in its primitive state of perfection, as some suppose and imagine, then it would constantly and effectually draw to every virtuous and praise-worthy action; then nothing would be wanting but to convince the mind by proper arguments, and to shew what is duty, in order to perform it; or, on the other hand, to shew what is hurtful and unbecoming, in order to avoid it. But, in the present state of things, it is evident to the conviction of all unbiassed minds who take scripture and experience for their guide, that the strongest efforts of reasoning, in the present state of human depravity, are utterly insufficient, unless accompanied by a divine power, to draw men to the service of God, or to convince them of the danger of their condition, as sinners against him. We who preach find

in a thousand instances, that, when we have reasoned with our hearers, as Paul did with Felix, and sought out acceptable words, and ransacked, from every quarter, cogent arguments suited to our subject, yet after all, we have been no nearer accomplishing the object in view than when we began. Say, have not many of you been persuaded at the time we were addressing you, that the motives we used were strong, that we were urging you to your own best interests? You trembled, perhaps, like Felix; you resolved, you attempted to reform. But the impressions made, how transient! The conviction how slight! How soon did you return to the paths of pleasureable sin! How far short did you fall of being effectually drawn to the love and service of God! So true it is, that we may persuade men almost to any thing, except to seek after the things which make for their everlasting peace! Hence it appears, that whatever influence moral arguments may have upon sound uncorrupted reason, yet they are unavailable on the dark and disordered minds of men, especially with regard to matters of a spiritual and everlasting concern. There is no less difference

ference between reason in primitive innocence, and its present depraved state, than between a man in the highest delirium, and another in the sober exercise of his rational faculties.

SUCH being unquestionably the case with regard to man in his present sinful state, nothing can rouse the attention, or excite the apprehension of danger in him who is emphatically said in scripture, to be *dead in trespasses and sins*, till new light is darted into the benighted mind; till spiritual eyesight is given, and spiritual objects are represented in their proper colours. Therefore he who caused the *light*, at first, *to shine out of darkness*, is said also, *to shine in our hearts* *; not indeed giving any light thereby different from the word, but causing us to *see wondrous things out of God's law*; which we never saw before, and leading us to the knowledge of ourselves, as sinners guilty and condemned by God's law. Thus the Lord opens the sinner's understanding, and in a way most becoming his infinite goodness and grace, touches the spring of his

* 2 Cor. iv. 6.

fears,

fears, by the serious consideration of that broken law which ministers wrath and condemnation. New, and hitherto unthought of, impressions of danger crowd into his mind; and the arrows of conviction fasten there. He now considers himself a natural born subject of the eternal Sovereign; that he is under subjection to a righteous law which he ought ever to have made a lamp to his feet, but which he hath hitherto made it is business to trample on and despise; that this violated law has a penalty no less dreadful than just, even an infinite punishment for an infinite offence; and that to this punishment he is liable, as he can neither make atonement for past transgression, nor fulfil its future demands of perfect obedience.

WHEN the mind is once arrested, and its attention fixed to the consideration of that law by which is the knowledge of sin, is there any thing more natural for one in this situation than to look around for help? How welcome must it be to the soul, under the apprehension of deserved wrath, to hear of a deliverer!

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WHEREFORE I proceed to observe,

2. THAT the Lord also draws sinners to himself by the cross of Christ: agreeable to that prediction of his, *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me* *.

NOT the most sweet and comfortable promises of the word of God can quiet the mind of an accusing conscience, and the soul that dreads the wrath of God, till a discovery is made of the pardoning love of God, thro' the blood of Jesus. Then, with joy and transport, he is sweetly and powerfully constrained by the spirit of God, to *flee for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before him* †. Thus no compulsion, nor violence is used, neither is it necessary, when the sinner becomes *willing in the day of God's power*. He is then enlightened to see the necessity of salvation through the cross of Christ, and the importunate cry of his soul is, *Lord, save, or I perish*. And as one that is athirst needs no constraint to take the cooling stream; neither he that is hungry and famished to

John xii. 32.

† Heb. vi. 18.

partake

partake of the refreshment set before him; so the sinner that is convinced by the spirit of God to see his sinfulness and misery, will, from that conviction, be constrained to come to Christ for life and salvation.

THINK now what will be the reflections of the sinner who by faith *beholds the lamb of God taking away sin!* What emotions of wonder! What workings of astonishment and surprize; but above all, of the warmest and most unaffected love must possess his soul! We imagine him saying, *And did Jesus die, and gave himself a ransom for me? Be astonished, O heavens, and wonder, O earth! Did the Creator of all become a worm, and no man? Did he bow his sacred head so low for the chief of sinners?—Yes; he loved me, and gave himself for me. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! What shall I, what can I, render unto the Lord for all his benefits? Shall I not yield my members up instruments of righteousness unto God, and live unto him who lived and died for me?—*If such be the language of the pardoned sinner, it may be asked, whether any other than the cords of love are necessary
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to draw the man thus affected and influenced by the spirit of God, to all the ways of holy obedience? Would one condemned to die, need dragging to serve his deliverer? Would a poor debtor need compassion to thank and love the benefactor who paid the sum he owed, and obtained his discharge?—Such monsters of ingratitude, in nature, there may have been;—but I may venture, with confidence, to assert, that the late trembling believer cannot stand at the foot of the cross, looking on him whom he has pierced, hanging there; and believe that *he was wounded for his transgressions, and bruised for his iniquities*, and yet, at the same time, turn a deaf ear to his gracious voice, and prove indifferent whether his name is glorified or blasphemed; whether his interests flourish or decay on the earth.

WILL it not be more agreeable to his new nature, his new principles and views, to cry out, *And is my Deliverer and Saviour, a King? And desires he no more of me, as a test of gratitude for his redeeming love, but to take his yoke upon me—to learn of him, and to keep his commandments?* O blessed
injunc-

injunctions! O pleasing yoke! O delightful bands! O glorious pattern!— Let never, — O blessed Redeemer, let that day never dawn that shall see me, with the ungodly, *break these bands asunder, or cast away these cords from me!* Long, alas! too long, I have forgotten thee; but now, through thy grace, while my pulse beats, let my heart be warmed, yea, ravished with thy love. Wherever thou dost point the way, there, in the strength of thy grace, I'll run. Thy people shall be my people; thy friends my friends, and thy foes shall be mine. Thy service I esteem as perfect freedom; thy yoke my delight; thy work my business; thy law as a light to my feet; thy commandments my choice; thy word my song; thy cross my glory; thy reproach my honour; thy righteousness my trust and boast. Thy interests my interests; thy cause my cause. Where thou goest, I'll follow; thy presence is my heaven; thy rod I'll kiss, and evermore say, *do with me, Lord, as seemeth good in thy sight.*

To this purport will be the language of that soul, whom the Lord *draws with*

with cords of a man, and with bands of love.

3. THE Believer is also drawn as *with cords of a man*, to the exercise of the various graces of the Christian life.

WE have already seen an apprehension of guilt and danger alarming the soul, and exciting him to cry after deliverance. But this fear is rather of a legal than of an evangelical kind, and scarcely deserves the name of godly sorrow. But, in consequence of beholding, by faith, *the lamb of God*, taking away sin, agonizing and dying on the cross, to redeem such a guilty sinner as he is from eternal death, he feels emotions of a more tender kind. In this glass he beholds such sights as fills his mind with horror at his former folly. He now *mourns*, not because he dreads hell, but because he acted a part to deserve it, while at the same time he entertains well-grounded hopes of deliverance from it, and waters a free and a full forgiveness with his tears.

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THE different feelings arising from the workings of free and evangelical repentance, thus distinguish themselves;—'tis the fear of hell that occasions the one; 'tis the hope of heaven that excites the other:—'tis the justice of God, in his awful display of majesty and wrath, that causes the former; 'tis the goodness of God that draws forth the latter:—the thoughts of divine punishment, in casting both body and soul into hell, causes dread; but the the thoughts of divine mercy higher than the heavens, and displayed in pardoning, inspire hope. — The thunders of mount Sinai denouncing vengeance, are heard and dreaded; but it is the still small voice of God's holy spirit, that whispers peace and comfort. Legal sorrow flows from the thoughts of sins committed, heinous and unpaid; but evangelical repentance flows from faith in the blood of Jesus, as *cleansing from all sin*. — The one proceeds from wrong thoughts of God as an absolute God; but the other from scriptural views of him as he has there revealed himself to be a God in covenant, to be *in Christ, reconciling sinners unto himself*. — The one is full of dread at the thoughts of
of

of drawing near to a holy and avenging God; the other fills the soul with holy boldness in coming to his throne, as to the throne of his shining grace, the throne of a reconciled father. — Legal sorrow worketh death, and gendereth unto bondage; but evangelical repentance for sin worketh life and peace, and is attended with the spirit of adoption. In a word; the one hates sin as it kindles wrath; the other, as it offends a father reconciled, who has laid his wrath aside.

Joy is another disposition that must be found in the soul of him that is drawn to the Redeemer *with cords of a man*; for the joy of deliverance will be in exact proportion to the greatness of danger, and a sense of obligation to him who has delivered.

As one beating for hours against the boisterous waves on a piece of wreck, must be joyful when unexpected deliverance comes; so a soul that is awakened, and brought under unfeigned concern about its eternal interests, must be full of joy as well as peace, when he hears of, and is led to prize an

G almighty

almighty deliverer. The highest tides of earthly joy generally flow on the back of the ebbings of creature comforts. Would a mother have such joy at the sight of her son continually going out and in, as on his sudden return from long captivity whence she had despaired of ever seeing him more? Did not the lost sheep, and lost silver when found, give more joy to the owners than if they had always possessed them? Does not the vessel that was many weeks tossed about, and in the utmost jeopardy of foundering, give more joy when it comes in sight, than another vessel all the while in the harbour? So if the guilty soul was truly afraid of losing the favour of God, or believed its actual loss, and thereby the loss of the soul, would it not be proportionably joyful from a sense of that favour restored, and the belief that God is reconciled, and that his anger is turned away?

OBSERVE, farther, how rationally, and yet by a spiritual operation, the soul is drawn *to the love of the brethren*. If the pardoned sinner unfeignedly *loves him that begat*, surely he *will love him also that is begotten of*
God!

God! It will be his desire to put far away all malice and hatred. That love is far from genuine, which pretends to love the Lord Jesus, and yet feels not the genuine workings of it towards others, even all his children, for his sake. How unreasonable, as well as unscriptural, are all the dispositions which are in opposition to the love of the brethren? Surely he who has seen his own danger, cannot hate but pity the sinner. He who has seen so much corruption and evil dispositions in his own heart, and his daily provocations in the sight of God, cannot be irreconcilable to a brother for those offences committed against himself. He who has had a thousand talents forgiven of God, will not take his brother by the throat for a hundred pence due to him, saying, *pay me what owest!* He that is mourning over his own sins, will not surely act the censorious part, or be the first to find fault with the conduct of others. He to whom God hath freely given his own Son, will not act the miser's part in with-holding supplies from the needy. He who enjoys the peace of God that passeth all understanding, will not be the first to be a peace-breaker, a firebrand, or an

incendiary. He who sees the beauty and preciousness of Christ, must surely love his image, wherever he beholds it. Neither can he who has seen his own danger, be unconcerned at the danger of others, but he will pity and pray for, or expostulate with such as God gives him opportunity.

RESIGNATION, in like manner, will evidence itself by the soul that is drawn of God.

SUCH an one having known, and in some measure believed the love that God hath towards him, dare not question his divine proceedings. This makes him still ;—causes him to lye low before God, and to say, *It is the Lord, let him do as seemeth him good.* If God spared not his own Son, but reconciled him when an enemy, how much more will he not do him good when a friend? If the believer has trusted his God with his eternal interests, how can he be distrustful of his temporal concerns? If there are so many bye-ways, and he so apt to wander, can he murmur at the kind hand of God in bringing him back, even though he should make use of the rod of chastisement?

GODLY

GODLY FEAR is another disposition in such a soul. He fears the Lord and his goodness. God puts this grace in the hearts of those whom he effectually draws to himself, and thereby keeps them from departing from him. When the believer sees God's indignation against sin, by the strokes laid on his dear Son; and the anguish of his Redeemer's heart, on the same account, he cannot but fear to sin, and to offend his God. The believer, therefore, that is most happily freed from the slavish fear of punishment, will also have most of that reverential fear of God, which causes him to fear the evil of sin, and to walk humbly with God.—But I proceed, now,

II. To observe, that the *bands of love* are the proper and suitable cords which the Lord uses in drawing sinful men.

THERE are no slaves in the house of God. *His yoke is easy; his burden light; and his work truly honourable and glorious.* Much of the allegiance rendered to earthly Sovereigns, is the effect of dread or compulsion; and dictated by the fears of the subjects;

and as extorted from them, in many cases, by the tyrannical engines of arbitrary power, they long for an opportunity of breaking off the yoke.

THE blinded nations whom the devil holds in vassalage and slavery, are said to perform their diabolical rites, through the dread of his hurting them. But the Lord's free men are manumitted. *The Son hath made them free.* It is the cord of love that binds them for ever to his service, and bores their ears to the posts of the Lord's house, Nor would it consist with the dignity of the Lord of Angels to rule merely over slaves. He will reign without a rival, and nothing but the throne of the heart will satisfy; and O how just is *his* title to it!

It matters not how many duties are attempted, nor what appearance of zeal there is in religious service, unless the heart be his. It is this he desires, yea, commands. Nothing will content him till all other Lords are dethroned, and he is set up as the ruler there. In order to this, he condescends to *stand at the door and knock*, and wait for admittance.

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He lays siege, and carries on his approaches, till he gains the fortress of the sinner's heart. Though he sometimes seems to erect a battery in his anger, and to batter the soul with the dreadful artillery of the law, as if he meant nothing else than to destroy it, as with unquenchable fire; though the loud noise made by the dreadful curses of the fiery law may cause such an apprehension, and though the Lord may thus seem determined to break in pieces by breach upon breach; yet it is, that in the end, the soul maybe kindled by the flames of heavenly love.

HERE, then, among a thousand instances, we see that *God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor his ways as our ways*. Men subdue by power, and crush their enemies by wreathing the yoke of slavery and vassalage by force, that they may draw the weighty load of cruel bondage; but 'tis truly God-like thus to win the heart, and to make subjects by turning his most inveterate foes into most affectionate and loyal worshippers and servants. And, indeed, there appears no other way so worthy of a God, or so suitable to win the soul (unless human nature

were different from what it is), as by wooing it; or to kindle love there, as by loading it with great and God-like acts of beneficence and love. Tyrants may force the language of the lip, and make the knee bend in an involuntary homage; but think for a moment, how could any of you command your affections, or force your heart to love that tyrant, who was exerting his power, and attempting to extort your love by threats? The truth of the preceding observation arises from the consideration of the genuine nature of love, which is one of the most delicate affections of the human mind; 'tis a tender plant of heavenly original; a frown will kill it; an angry or forbidden look will, like a frosty night, nip the tender bud, and cause its greenest leaves to wither. God is therefore so tender of his children and their graces, that *he keeps them as the apple of his eye*; he guards them while in their infant state, as the vine-dresser does the tender grape till brought to maturity.

THUS, the observation of the wise man is confirmed, that *love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave; the coals thereof*
are

*are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it. If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly contemned *.*

AGAIN:—that *the bands of love* are the proper and suitable cords which the Lord uses in drawing sinners to himself, appears from this, that as God's favour is life, so there can be no enjoyment of it without love; for *God is love: and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him †.* It was God who first set his love upon those whom he chuses and calls by his grace; and it is this which excites the Christian's love to God: hence such can say, *We love him, because he first loved us ‡.* Love is, as it were, the element in which such happy souls think, move, and act; this is the pure and heavenly air they breathe; this is the sun that warms them; the wine that cheers them; the food of angels that strengthens them. The believer beholds his compassionate Lord coming down from his celestial throne, put-

* Solomon's Song viii. 6, 7. † 1 John iv. 16.

‡ Ver. 19.

ting on the mean garb of humanity, arraying himself in the garments of salvation, and *riding forth in his chariot paved with love for the daughters of Jerusalem.* He sees him also in his word of grace putting off the awful terrors wherewith he clothed himself on Sinai, speaking pardon and peace thro' the blood of his cross, to guilty sinners, assuring us that God is in Christ reconciling sinners to himself; and he hears God, for Christ's sake, declaring to his believing people, that *he will be merciful to their unrighteousness; and their sins and iniquities he will remember no more **. What more could he have said, or done in order to woo and draw sinners to himself? Has he not taken the most winning methods of condescension and love.

THESE are *bands of love*, which not only draw, but constrain those who feel them to run. Hence the prayer of the Church is, *draw me, we will run after thee †*; and, saith the Psalmist, *I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart ‡*.

† Solomon's Song, i. 4. * Heb. viii. 12.

‡ Ps. cxix. 32.

LOVE, above all things, oils the wheels of obedience. The soul, drawn by the love of God, *mounts up as on eagle's wings, runs without weariness, and walks without fainting* *. Would you have a man active in your service, and zealous for your interest? Try to win his heart. See if you can cast the cords of love gently around him. If so, of your enemy you will make your truest friend. Then, at the midnight hour he will arise for your defence and help. Not the goads of threatening; not the sharp scourge of power, which so often causes slaves to shake their heads; not merely subjection to authority, nor even the hopes of reward, are the generous motives which principally excite the believer to obedience: but he is sweetly and powerfully drawn to the service of his God, as expressed in our text, *with cords of a man, with bands of love*.

I N F E R E N C E S.

1. FROM this subject we are taught the need of a divine influence and agency. It is God who draws sinners. *No man can*

* Isa. lx. 31.

come to me, saith Christ, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him *. The doctrine which supposes that the sinner dead in trespasses and sins can quicken his own soul; or that the saint can make progress in his way to heaven, without fresh supplies and anointing from above, is equally contrary to scripture and experience.

2. WHAT a wonderful display of mercy appears in the method of God's drawing sinners! He does not drag them by force, but constrains them by love. How great is his condescension! That he should, by his spirit, strive, and knock, and plead for admission into their hearts; and all this, to make the sinner see his true interest, and pursue it; — to convince him that he has slighted the counsel of God against himself; that he has slighted his motions, and undervalued his heavenly visits. How rich is his grace! that he should at so much expence have twisted these cords of love by which he draws sinners; and that, with heavenly skill, he has paved a way over which the soul may be drawn along to the gates of Paradise.

* John vi. 44.

3. DOES the Lord draw souls in a way so rational, and so much suited to the faculties of man? this shews us that his work of grace does not destroy, but that it restores the faculties of the soul. — This shews the injustice of the common objection that a divine agency tends to render man a machine, and to deprive him of all liberty and choice. It is the unconverted sinner that is a slave, and that is kept in bondage to Satan and his own lusts, whereas, *if the Son make us free, then are we free indeed.* God, so far from taking away the will of man in conversion, makes him willing, and work in him both to will, and to do of his own good pleasure. He rectifies and restores the depraved faculties of his soul.

THIS also serves to shew us, that, though moral suasion is of itself insufficient, without superior aid; still, as the Lord draws the soul in a way so consistent with its rational faculties, we are warranted to plead, to urge, and beseech sinners in the use of well-chosen and suitable arguments; — *to set life and death before you, by the terrors of the law to persuade men;* — to preach the law in order
to

to conviction; and by evangelical motives to recommend to believers an attention to the various duties of the Christian life. Whilst at the same time our dependance is on the spirit of God to give efficacy to these addresses, whose province it is both to begin and to carry on the good work of God in the soul.

4. Is it the work of God to draw sinners to himself?

WE may see the reason why many professors have been so long striving in vain to master their corruptions, and press forward in the ways of religion.

NOTWITHSTANDING their resolutions, wrestlings, and groans, they continue just as they were, and where they were; and the reason is, they take a wrong method; they were never sensible that it is *God that worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure*, nor believe the important declaration that *no man cometh unto the Father but by Christ*. No wonder, then, professor, if your heart remains cold and motionless, notwithstanding all your endeavours, since you set about
duties

duties in your own strength, and do not seek victory over sin and Satan in God's way, through faith in Christ, and in virtue of strength derived from above. Repair then to *the strong for strength*, and look to *Jesus the Author, and the Finisher of faith*. When sensible of your own weakness, you may hope for help in God.

5. BLESS the Lord, all ye his saints, that ever he put these bands of his love about you, when so many are tied with the cords of iniquity, and appear fast bound in them. *This is the Lord's doing*, and should be *marvellous in your eyes*. O let your warmest praises be ascribed unto him who causeth you to differ! Beware of grieving the good spirit of God. Cry mightily unto him that he would enlarge your heart more in his service; that your whole souls may be more engaged to love and serve him, by having his love shed abroad in your hearts, by the Holy Ghost given unto you;—that he would draw you so that you may run after him; and cause you to go *from strength to strength*, till you shall appear in Zion perfect before God.

S E R-

S E R M O N V.

I S A I A H XL. 11.

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

A SHEPHERD is one of the familiar and engaging characters which our dear Lord and Saviour assumes in his word, to represent his love and compassion towards those that are *the sheep of his pasture*, or the people of his choice: and his tenderness, under this character, is particularly referred to in my text, as it is exercised towards such as are the most feeble of the flock, the weakest of believers, who are here compared to *lambs*, whom *he gathers with his arm, and carries in his bosom*; or to *those ewes that are with young*, whom *he gently leads*.

IN

CHRIST HIS PEOPLES SHEPHERD. 97

IN pursuing our meditations on this delightful subject, we shall,

First, SHEW how justly the compassionate Redeemer may be said to feed his flock like a Shepherd;

THEN *Secondly*, ENQUIRE into the import of the expressions which are added, *he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.*

WITH regard to the relation which the Lord Jesus sustains in our text, we may remark, that though he has many different epithets given him in scripture, yet none of them suit him better, nor does he appear at any time in a more endearing light than when he is styled *the Shepherd* of his flock.

THIS is the engaging character under which the Father represents him *; and frequently his people are spoken of as his *flock*†. —How justly Christ is said to act in this ca-

* GEN. XLIX. 24.—ISA. XLIV. 28.—EZEK. XXXVII. 24.—ZECH. XI. 16, and XIII. 7.

† ZECH. X. 3.—LUKE XII. 32.

capacity of a *Shepherd*, will appear from the following, among other considerations.

1. His universal care of his flock ; his watching over them by night and by day ; and not only so, but the infinite regard he has had towards them from all eternity. Hence it is said, that he *was set up from everlasting, rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth, and that his delights were with the sons of men* *.

HAD not his eternal and infinite love been thus manifested towards his sheep, they had been taken, and led forth bound with cords that could not be loosed, to be sacrificed to the offended justice of God ; and were not his care continually manifested towards them in watching over their spiritual interests, they would soon fall a prey to the power and fraud of their spiritual enemies ; for

2. As sheep are some of the most defenceless of creatures, so their safety, in particular circumstances, depends on the courage as well as care of the shepherd. In those eastern countries where subsistence as well as wealth materially depended on the safety and

* Prov. viii. 23,—31.

number of the flocks, the shepherd was sometimes forced to put his life in hazard for the preservation of his trust. This David informed Saul was the case with regard to him when he kept his father's sheep *. So Christ's little flock are exposed to the attacks of many enemies: the wilderness where they feed swarms with roaring lions from the pit of hell, *walking about, seeking whom they may devour*; raging against their prey, yea, accounting them their property; for each of these, *the great Shepherd of the sheep* has had a wonderful combat, in order to take the prey from the mighty, and to set the prisoners free who had allowed themselves to be carried away captive. How often when this Abaddon, this destroyer has dragged them to the very mouth of his den; when hell was stirred to give them a reception, and in full expectation of admitting numbers, has the good shepherd obliged him to let go his hold, and retire ashamed, and has thus triumphed over him and all his infernal forces! He that is for his sheep to fight their battles, is more than all they that are against them. He hath ransomed *them from the power of*

* 1 Samuel xvii. 34, 35.

their enemies at the expence of his own life, Hence he declares, I am the good Shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep ; and again, I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand, &c. †.*

3. THE Lord Jesus Christ acts the Shepherd's part, as he brings back that which was strayed.

'Tis observed, that no creature is more apt to wander than a sheep; and therefore it is expected of a good Shepherd that he go after the wanderer, and bring back that which was driven away; and that if he lose one sheep of a hundred, that he leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which was lost until he find it ‡. And when he hath found it, with what tenderness, as well as joy, doth he lay it on his shoulders! An expression this, in our Lord's Parable, which intimates to us the inability and disinclination of the wandering sheep to return, if the shepherd look not after it. O how far had all Adam's posterity, as lost

* John x. 11.

† John x. 28.

‡ Luke xv. 4.

sheep,

sheep, strayed from their Shepherd, and the fold! Who would have been at the pains and expence of bringing them back again, but he is who is a light to the Gentiles, and God's salvation unto the ends of the earth? Though the precipice of eternal ruin was immediately before them, yet the whole flock were thoughtlessly running on, without apprehension of danger, pleased with the taste of those poisonous weeds that they found amidst these ragged rocks that overhanged the valley of destruction. Surely none can pretend that they never strayed, or that they were inclined to return of themselves. It is the Shepherd of Israel's work to reclaim the wanderers. Hence the necessity of our praying, *turn thou us, and so shall we be turned, draw us, and we will run after thee.*

4. CHRIST feeds his flock like a shepherd, by leading them into green pastures.

THOUGH the flock were once well satisfied to browse on the heath of this wilderness, and uttered no complaint thro' want of nourishment, yet they were all the while

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feeding

feeding on noxious and bitter herbs; but when the Lord reclaims the wanderings of his flock, he leads them for spiritual nourishment into the rich pastures of his grace, where they feed and grow fat like the flocks of Bashan. How many rich inclosures are in the church which he hath purchased! What sweet and delightful ordinances hath he provided for their soul's repast, where they feed to the full, and find cause to say, *it is good for us to be here!* Who that is acquainted with, or ever tasted the sweetness of the exceeding great and precious promises in God's word, can question how delightful is the fare of the children of God who live upon them, who have such present enjoyments, and are made to leap for joy in their future prospects unspeakably glorious!

5. CHRIST as the Shepherd of his flock accounts for them to the Father. They are God's elect; chosen of him before all worlds. Hence our Lord declares, *all that the Father giveth me shall come to me* *; and again, in his intercessory prayer for them he saith,

* John vi. 37.

Holy Father, keep thro' thine own Name those whom thou hast given me: while I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy Name; those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled: and again, behold I, and the children which God hath given me†. And Oh, how honourably and joyfully will he give up the kingdom, and all who belong to it, to the Father, when the number of his elect is accomplished! How will the universe ring with acclamations, when he pronounces the words, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!‡ The enemy dare not boast that he plucked any of them out of his hand, for the number shall be complete, lacking nothing. — Notwithstanding Jacob's care, the wild beasts had torn some of his flock, and he made it good§; but no such loss is sustained by the chief Shepherd of the sheep. Though the Devil has many for his prey, yet they belonged not to Christ's fold, nor were their names written in his book of life.*

* John xvii. 11, 12. † Heb. ii. 13. ‡ Matth. xxv. 31.
§ Genesis xxxi. 39.

He is hourly watching over them as one that is to give an account; however unconcerned they may be, *he slumbers not, nor sleeps*; and, on another day, he will present them faultless and complete, before his Father's throne.

6. HE gives strength to the weak, and renews ability to them that have no might.

No wonder that his flock should be in such bad plight when first brought from so unhealthful a desert, and from off the barren mountains of vanity. But when they are utterly unable of themselves to pursue the cloud of witnesses, or to keep the footsteps of the flock, they are made *to wait upon him, and renew their strength; to run and not weary, to walk and not faint* *; and in the midst of weakness they are made strong: *through Christ which strengtheneth them, they can do all things* †. Though at the sheep of Christ's first returning to the fold, they seem halt and lame, wounded by sin and Satan, yet the weak and feeble believer, through grace assisting him, becomes

* Isa. lx. 31.

† Philip. iv. 13.

as David; and nothing has been more generally acknowledged by them then this, that as their day has been, so they have found their strength to be also. It is nothing but remaining unbelief, that causes any to faint or grow weary, or to be so soon affrighted at the prospect of this, or the other difficult duty, or sore trial. Faith, when lively, takes courage, and speaks another language; and through the power and prevalence of this grace, what may not, what has not been done *? And as the Lord's hand of power is not straitned, so Faith, thro' the supply of the spirit of Jesus, is capable of doing great things. *Be strong therefore in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom †. Fear nothing but sin: fear no duty or trial if God call you to it; only believe; and, tho' weak and complaining, go up from this wilderness, leaning on your beloved ‡.*

7. CHRIST the Shepherd will not overdrive the weak, and the lambs of the flock.

* See Hebrews, chap. XI.

† Luke. xii. 32.

‡ Canticles viii. 5.

HE knows their feeble frames, and remembers that they are but dust. He counts their groans, numbers their sighs, and puts their tears in his bottle, and therefore treats them with tenderness and pity. The administration of the affairs in providence and grace is committed unto him: all power is his, and is managed by him in an entire subserviency to the good of his church, and the happiness of every individual in his flock. *He causes the wrath both of men and devils to praise him, and the remainder thereof he will restrain.* The earth itself has often helped the woman; yea, all things work together for the good of his chosen; and all things are theirs. Nothing can or dare hurt them; the stones of the field are in league with them. Why then should they be afraid? You may think, believer, that it is hard work to keep up with the flock in the best of days, when your affections are lively, and your souls are going hard out after God; and you may ask, how then can you run with them in the dark and wintry days of approaching age, when your present views may flag, and your graces languish? Nevertheless, hold out stedfastly, and let this cheering

cheering word be your never-failing consolation, *The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want, &c **.

7. CHRIST brings all his flock safe to the fold.

WHEN he goes out to seek and to save them, he brings them back to himself and to the whole sheepfold, where no ravenous wolf can enter. However roughly the enemy treated them when straying in the wilderness, yet the fold is so secured by the bars of omnipotent love, that he never did, and never shall pluck any out of it. Tho' he may annoy with his darts of temptation, yet he has no power to inflict a mortal wound. Christ, the Shepherd, leads his sheep safely by the lions dens, and the mountains of prey. He manifests his divine skill and care in preserving them in the midst of danger; and, in the time appointed, he will bring young and all home, and house them safe from all the toils of the field, and dangers of the way. The happy day approaches for the consummation of their felicity,

* Ps. xxiii. 1.

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when they shall be for ever fat and flourishing; brought into their proper air and native elements; where they shall with everlasting transport be lodged in that fold where no thief breaks through, no Devil tempts, no wicked man annoys, no sin or sorrow invade the peace and joy of the happy, happy saint.

CHRIST gives unto his sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of his hand. The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ. What can be freer than a gift? What can be more valuable than life eternal? What though calamities, sorrows, and death await the believer here below? Time is short; and present sorrows will impart a sweeter relish to heaven's future joys. You will more cheerfully, believer, adore the Shepherd that brought you safely through, and sing in the loudest notes of praise *Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, &c.* *

WE proceed now, *Secondly*, to enquire into the import of the expressions, which are

* Rev. i. 5.

added in our text ; *he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.*

1. By lambs we are no doubt to understand that part of the flock who are the most tender, and require the most delicate management. They are stiled in Isaiah * such as are the *meek, broken-hearted, captives, bound, mourners, and in Ezekiel, the diseased, the sick, that which was broken, driven away, and lost* †.

YOUNG believers are with great propriety compared to lambs, inasmuch as they are often so weak, and the principle of grace within them so faint, that if the heavenly Shepherd did not strengthen them, they would seem ready to die. But he hath graciously promised that he will *not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax* ‡ ; and that where he hath begun the good work he will perform it §.

As the flame of a lamp, however strong it may be, needs to be watched and cherished with supplies of oil ; or the tender plant

* Isa. xli. 2, 3. † Ezek. xxxiv. 4. ‡ Isa. xlii. 2.

§ Phil. i. 6.

to be preserved from being crushed by the travellers foot, which may afterwards withstand the strongest blast; so do the trees of righteousness, the Lord's plantation, and the tender shoots of grace in particular, need the fostering hand of divine protection and nurture.

THE young are always the most defenceless, and incapable to ward off danger, as well as inexperienced, and unacquainted with the steps which lead thereto. Hence they are ever ready to turn aside from the right path, as well as unable to pursue their way thither: therefore how like the good Shepherd is it to express the greatest tenderness where it is most wanted! The blessing of many ready to perish, has come upon him who thus gathers the lambs in his bosom.

THE young being the most defenceless, are consequently most exposed to various enemies that lie in wait to devour. How true this of the young convert! What an inveterate enmity does Satan bear him! How assiduous to throw his yoke again round his neck! The world also joins in opposing the
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the convert; and if they cannot finally prevail, yet what joy does it give them if they entice him into sin so as to stain his robes, discredit religion, and bring dishonour on the ways of God! —As the young of other creatures are most exposed to danger, so God has inspired that instinct into them, to have the most affectionate tenderness to their offspring. And shall He who is the former of all creatures, the almighty and all-wise agent, himself be wanting in bowels of tenderness and compassion? No — *He carries the lambs in his bosom.* However weak the vital spark of spiritual life may be, he will kindly cherish it, that it shall no more languish or die, since the Lord who is the fountain of life is become their life.

WHAT unspeakable tenderness is there in the form of expression in our text, in order to cheer the minds of his drooping timorous saints, by assuring them of his tenderness and love towards them! —A mother forgets her sorrow, on hearing that her child is born into the world: what more natural than for a mother, when she sees the child that occasioned her throws, to clasp, yea, press him
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to her breast, as nearest her heart? Such is the conduct of the chief Shepherd, and blessed Redeemer of finners, who bore the wrath of God's offended justice, was in an agony, and suffered death for the spiritual deliverance of his people. Need we wonder then to see him so desirous to embrace the child of his love? That he has such satisfaction at beholding the travail of his soul, his spiritual seed new born into the kingdom of grace? Hear the language of melting tenderness towards even his revolting, sinful people; *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim, &c.* * and again, *Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord* †.

LET me add, that the Lord *carries the lambs in his bosom*, as a prelude to their being in his bosom for ever.

* Hosea xi. 8.

† Jer. xxxi. 20.

THE youngest disciple of Jesus leaned on his bosom, while he was on earth ; but, another day, all his disciples, whether old or young, shall rest, not in Abraham's bosom, but in that of their beloved Saviour and Lord, and that for ever.

As the believer dies in the favour, and in the arms of Jesus, so he goes to be clasped in the bosom of his love. In the mean time, none shall pluck the lamb from him. He will guide him with his eye, and keep his eye on him through all his wanderings, till he comes to Zion with everlasting joy. And Oh ! how ravishing and inexpressible will then be the mutual gratulations between the Shepherd and the sheep ! — *And is the babe that was dandled so long on the knee of my mercy, that was so feeble and exposed to such dangers, now brought to glory, and arrived at the fulness of the measure of a perfect man in Christ Jesus ! while the ransomed soul will reply, and is this my adoreable Redeemer whom I loved, and regretted that I loved no more upon earth ! Is this the delightful mansion he hath prepared for me ! These the resplendent robes I am to wear ! And this the*

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bright crown of glory to put on my head! O I am lost in wonder, love, and praise, at grace so free, mercy so rich, and love so astonishing and boundless!

2. IT is farther added in our text, *he shall gently lead those that are with young.*

PERHAPS by such as *are with young*, we may understand such as are awakened to some sense of sin, under the terrors of that law which worketh wrath, and is the minister of condemnation, and causes the pangs of the new birth. Though the metaphor of the text is not to be strained, or too closely traced, yet certain it is, with regard to those who are begotten again unto a lively hope, that many have gone burdened days and months before they have been delivered from a spirit of bondage, and brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

By *gently leading those that are with young*, is intimated to us the Redeemer's great care about his people; for the metaphor in our text of Christ as a Shepherd would be defective, if the Shepherd's care about those
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that are with young was omitted. These, and the lambs of the flock, engage the kind and watchful Shepherd's principal attention. It is needful that he be well acquainted with their situation, otherwise he would be in danger of losing the fruit of his labour. So the Redeemer shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. He redeems his sheep by *power* as well as *price*; and his skill in watching over them, managing and leading them through this wilderness in the midst of enemies, is as great a proof of his wisdom and kindness towards them, as was his love in giving up himself unto death, as the price of their redemption. The early periods of the life of Christians, evidence the care and almighty power of the Shepherd of his flock, in cherishing conviction, strengthening graces, and increasing the vigour of that spiritual life begun in their souls. They can do nothing, neither can they live without him, for he is the life of their life. The believer can no more preserve than he can give life; and therefore he stands in constant need of the supply of the spirit of Jesus.

ARE there any in this situation? — Be of good cheer. As the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, so also out of the womb of conversion and grace; and none shall be over driven, or tried above what they are able to bear.

I M P R O V E M E N T.

1. Is the Redeemer the Shepherd who is appointed to watch over the flock?—Then surely they shall not, cannot want. Whatever their share of trials and difficulties may be, yet the Lord will satisfy their souls in drought, leading them beside the still waters of comfort; while others hunger, you, O believer, shall eat; while others are thirsty, you shall drink of rivers of spiritual pleasure. And yet a little while, and *thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended* *. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon; but the redeemed shall walk there; and the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come

* Isaiah lx. 20.

to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

O HOW happy a choice, then, were ye inclined to make, who have put yourselves under the care of this Shepherd! He will care for you in life and death; for *precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.*

THOUGH many of those falsely accounted Shepherds, seek after the fleece rather than the sheep, yet Christ is *the good Shepherd, who laid down his life for this sheep.*

2. How should the Under-shepherds be excited to vigilance, when we hear of the care of the chief Shepherd!

DOES the eternal God condescend to account the meanest of his flock not beneath his notice? And does he perform kind offices towards them? And shall we who have the care of souls disdain any service as too mean, so that we may promote the spiritual interests of those committed unto us? Or

* Isaiah xxxv. 9, 10.

shall we neglect to watch over those for whom Christ died? — This be far from the Ministers of Christ!

3. Is our Shepherd so careful and tender in gathering the lambs in his arms? Then why disquieted, O ye of little faith? However weak your graces, however feeble you are, yet he knows your frame. Many in like circumstances has he led to glory. None of them have miscarried in his hands; nor shall any that trust in him and commit themselves unto him.

4. BUT are we the sheep of Christ? — Examine and enquire; such hear, and know his voice, and follow him. If you follow any other besides Christ, you are none of his sheep, for a stranger such will not follow. *As his servants ye are to whom ye obey,* so his flock ye are whose footsteps ye follow. Sheep are harmless, meek, and patient. Such ought to be the sheep of Christ. A flock of sheep love to feed and lie down together: it is difficult to separate them; so, if Christ's sheep, you will love to assemble yourselves together,

together, and be of an uniting rather than a dividing spirit.

AT the last day, the Lord Jesus *shall separate the sheep from the goats*. How dreadful to be of the latter number! to be placed at the left hand! Sinners, give up yourselves to him, seek after an interest in him, and follow him.

S E R M O N VI,

EXODUS XXXII. 9, 14.

And the Lord said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.

And Moses besought the LORD his GOD, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people? &c.

Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people.

And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.

IT is certainly an undeniable proof of divine patience, that the Lord bears so long with men who have provoked him to wrath, as in the case of Israel of old, when
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it is considered that his opposition to sin is so irreconcilable; that it is what his very soul hateth, being directly contrary to the holiness of his nature. Many a declaration is to be found against it in his word, and not fewer are manifested in the course of his dispensations in providence. *God is angry with the wicked every day; and he hateth all the workers of iniquity.*

THE particular sin of Israel, referred to in the words of the text, against which the displeasure of a holy God waxed so hot, was their idolatrous disposition, discovered in getting Aaron, at their instigation, to make a Molten Calf, and in transferring their homage from the Creator to an inanimate image of their own formation, in express contradiction of the first and great command, *Thou shalt have no other Gods before me.** As it was the sin of gross *idolatry*, so also of vile *ingratitude*, inasmuch as they thus evilly requited their gracious Lord and Deliverer, who, with an outstretched arm on their behalf, had *brought them out of the land of Egypt, and out of the house of bondage*; who

Exod. xx. 2.

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was then providing for their wants, fighting their battles, giving them his ordinances, and a revelation of his will, by means of his servant Moses; and who was accomplishing in the methods of his providence, his gracious purposes towards them, in bringing them to the land of Canaan, flowing with milk and honey.

AND the Lord said unto Moses, go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them; they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, these, by thy Gods, O Israëb, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt! And the Lord said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and behold it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them.

AND Moses besought the Lord:— turn from thy fierce wrath.— And the Lord repented of the evil he thought to do unto his people.

FROM

FROM these words we shall take occasion, *First*, to remark that God is provoked by sin, and his justice is set upon punishing it. *Secondly*, shall shew the great interest which God's praying people have ever had with him, in preventing the execution of his threatened judgments. This will lead me to enforce, *Thirdly*, the obligation which is laid upon Christians, Moses-like, to wrestle with God for averting his displeasure from a sinful revolting people.

FIRST, we lay it down as an undeniable truth that a holy God is provoked by sin.

THERE is nothing in the universe that God appears to be displeased with, but moral evil, because it is not his workmanship; for all *that* was pronounced to be *very good*. Sin is the production of God's inveterate foe; the effect of his enmity against the Most High. The throne of iniquity reared in avowed opposition to the Almighty Creator. Satan by the prevalence of his temptation, and the introduction of sin into the world, hath obtained an usurped empire, whose aim is to thwart the designs

designs of God; to eclipse his glory; stain his honour; and to bely his truth. And tho' the roaring lion is caught in his own trap; though by that which Satan thought to have blemished God's attributes, they have received their most glorious lustre, still God's face is set against sin; the artillery of his vengeance is pointed, and his hands direct war against it; his scheme of matchless wisdom is devised for expelling it from the creation; nor will his universe enjoy one undisturbed day, till the works of Satan shall be destroyed, and sin extirpated. The only blot that could ever have fallen on God's workmanship was sin.

Is it not a strong indication of God's displeasure against sin, when rather than that any appearance of stain should abide on the works of his hands, he will demolish the whole fabric of the universe, not repair it, but will make a new heaven and a new earth, wherein nothing but righteousness shall dwell? Will set up a new and glorious kingdom in which he will reign without the smallest opposition? Nor is it the practice of sin only, but its dwelling also that shall finally

finally be destroyed, *all old things must be done away, and all things become new.*

ALL the waters above and below could not wash the foul stain away which sin had brought upon the earth; and therefore he who sits as a refiner purifying the sons of Levi, will also purge the universe with an universal conflagration, and take down this grand and extensive fabric, being enfeebled with sin, like the house in which was the fretting leprosy of old.

SIN cannot but be the object of God's abhorrence, when we consider that by it his image is defaced, which was originally drawn upon the soul of man; and since by it confusion has been introduced into the world which was at first the seat of order and harmony. It was sin which provoked God to withdraw himself from the habitation of the earth—to bar up the way of access to the throne of God, and to the tree of life; and solemnly to declare, before the flood, *my spirit shall not always strive with man; and I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth.* O what harmony was
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interrupted between God, Angels, and Men, in that hour when sin was committed! How blessed was the concord which sin destroyed! Till then, universal peace subsisting: God at peace with Man; Man with himself; Man with Angels; Man with the inferior creation, on whom the awe of him was impressed. But such was the accursed nature of sin that it broke every string in this universal harmony; marred the heavenly melody, and introduced the most harsh and discordant notes. What, then, must sin's nature be which brought along with it such a horrid train of confusion at its heels? Need we wonder if God's justice be drawn forth, and his displeasure excited against it, and if he swear that *though hand join in hand the wicked shall not be unpunished* * ?

LET us reflect what signal monuments of vengeance God's justice has raised in every age and country, in proof of his displeasure against sin.

WHAT are the ingredients of most histories but lists of the judgments which a holy

* Prov. xi. 21.

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and righteous God hath inflicted on a sinful people. How many pages are filled with the dismal tale of cities buried, or of towns demolished, by God's shaking terribly the earth. How many volumes are swelled with the history of this siege, and that battle; the life of this hero, or of that renowned general. And what is all this but, in other words, relating who were the greatest butchers of mankind, and most successful in filling the graves with the dead? How many torrents since the great deluge have swept provinces and inhabitants off the face of the earth? Many a stream of blood that has flowed, and floods of tears that has been shed, prove how high God's displeasure has run against sin, that accursed thing which his soul hateth.

SODOM and Gomorrah; Tyre and Sidon; Nineveh and Babylon; and other populous and renowned cities, which have met with similar overthrows and desolation, are left on record as monuments of the divine displeasure against the workers of iniquity.

BUT, above all, God's displeasure at sin, and his justice in the infliction of punishment
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on account of it, are awfully displayed in the sufferings and death of his Son Jesus Christ.

THE justice of God would not compound, or admit of partial reparation for that dishonour which sin reflected upon him, being deaf to every proposal of pardon without satisfaction. Though an Angel had presumed to interpose; yea, had all the heavenly host been satisfied to have been banished from the presence of the Lord for ever; — or had all the fallen spirits in hell sought God to have had their punishment increased, and the mountains of distress raised upon them ten thousand times higher than they are; yet, neither in the one case nor in the other, would justice have been satisfied, or a proper atonement have been made for the sin of man. Not all in heaven, earth, or hell, could avail to remove or sustain the punishment which sin had entailed on the guilty offender. Though the most fervent supplications had been offered by him; though an ocean of tears had been poured out; and the sinner's knees had been worn bare with his entreaties; though sacrifices

crifices and offerings had been multiplied, and all the beasts of the earth, and the fowls of heaven had been killed; yea, though all the guilty should propose to suffer the greatest torments, and for millions of years; yet the offending criminal would still be regarded with abomination by a holy God. So inviolably determined is he to shew the sincerity of his threatenings, that nothing short of a perfect reparation can satisfy the demands of offended justice.

HENCE the unabated demands made on the eternal Son of God, who, clothed in human flesh, and as the guilty sinner's substitute, *suffered once, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God.* Had favour been shewn to the sinner, or had there been a mitigation of the threatening denounced, without such a full and perfect satisfaction made for sin, iniquity might have taken shelter under such indulgence, and entertained the hope of justice not being so rigorous, or that the threatenings were not to be understood in all their latitude. Upon such a supposition, Devils might have insulted, and sinful men have been apt to presume. But, Oh, how

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awful were those frowns of justice so apparent in all the circumstances attending the sufferings and death of Jesus the sinner's substitute, which astonished nature, and caused the earth to tremble at its centre ! How impartial the payment ! — As justice is represented to be blind, knowing no man in judgment ; so, in the present case, the Lord Jesus Christ, though the eternal Son of God, and daily his delight ; and though all the finite love of Angels or Men fall infinitely short of that which eternally subsisted between the Father and the Son ; in point of comparison but as one feeble ray, and less than that, to the heat of the sun ; yet all that warmth of affection appeared suspended when the Son of God's love became the sinner's surety ; when *born of a woman, made under the law, and made sin for us* ; — when he thus became a sin-offering, and *bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows*. No light burden this ! Neither was it diminished from the consideration of his Father's eternal love ; for *it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and put him to grief* ; yea, to hide his face from him, which drew from him that affecting cry, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ?*

AFTER

AFTER all these bitter sufferings which the innocent Saviour, the darling of his Father's heart, underment as an offering for the sins of transgressors, it is astonishing that either Men or Devils should ever have flattered themselves that sin is not so great an evil; or that God is less strict in executing, than he is in pronouncing threatenings against the workers of iniquity!

BUT, *Secondly*, I proceed to shew the great interest which God's praying people have ever had with him, in preventing the execution of his threatened and deserved judgments.

1. THE holy violence of prayer appears to have been the great barrier between the the world and consuming judgments; this is the screen which has intercepted the flames of divine vengeance from bursting out upon a guilty land. Scripture affords a variety of striking examples wherein the safety of a nation and people is ascribed to the efficacy of, and to the honour which the Lord hath put upon prayer. Even in those passages where God declares, *tho' Moses and Samuel*

stood before me, yet my mind could not be towards this people; cast them out of my sight *. And again, *When the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, &c* — *Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, they should deliver but their own souls* †; even in such passages there is an evident testimony to me to the power of prayer, for though, in the heinous instances of iniquity there referred to, it might not be successful, it is at the same time implied that it often is so. — Witness that remarkable evidence of its efficacy recorded in our text. — Though the Israelitets had become chargeable with two of the greatest sins — open idolatry, and base ingratitude; and though the Lord said unto Moses, *let me alone that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them*; yet when this man of God besought him with earnest entreaty, and by fervent supplication deprecated his wrath from falling on a sinful people, the Lord graciously condescended to hear and answer his prayer; for we are told that *the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people*.

* Jer. xv. 1.

† Ezek. xiv. 13, 14.

WHEN the old world was destroyed by the deluge, there was a want of intercessors, for *Noah* was the only righteous person, and as he continued for the space of a hundred and twenty years *a preacher of righteousness* without success, who knows but that he might cease from his supplications, accounting it to be inconsistent with God's honour as supreme Governor to suffer such an incorrigible race to remain any longer?

THE pleading of *Abraham* is an instance of that familiarity and holy boldness wherewith Christians are encouraged to address themselves in prayer unto God. How sweet was the language of *Abraham's* supplication to him who hears prayer, on behalf of a wicked place and people *! What a proof does it afford that this only man, with whom so much of *the secret of the Lord* was, well knew that as an affectionate earthly Father is well pleased when one interposes to avert the punishment threatened on an undutiful son, so the Lord took pleasure in hearing the supplications of his praying people on behalf of ungodly sinners. No wonder, then,

* Gen. x. 23, &c.

if his example has encouraged all his sons in faith to take fast hold of the arm of avenging justice. The remarkable words in our text, are an undeniable proof that the Lord is well pleased with such an humble boldness, and holy importunity in the prayers and intercessions of his people, for they intimate as if his arm was held and arrested when about to inflict the stroke of punishment upon a sinful race.

2. THE truth of the doctrine advanced will appear, if we consider the promises which are made to the Church, and every individual member, of a gracious hearing, and bestowment of whatever they ask, in faith, consonant to the will of God. And nothing is more agreeable to him, than that his people should offer up fervent supplication to him on behalf of others; because, when proceeding from the heart, 'tis an evidence of the prevalence of that concern for God's glory, and compassion towards fellow men, which cannot but be pleasing unto him. This, likewise, is the highest expression of our love towards sinners, and that by which they may receive more benefit than

than by any thing besides which can be done for them.

It was particularly specified to Jewish believers, at the dedication of Solomon's temple, that when public judgments of pestilence, famine, or sword, should threaten or visit the land; then saith the Lord, *If my people which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, then will I hear from heaven, &c. Mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attentive unto the prayer that is made in this place, &c. **

Now, though the house at Jerusalem is abolished where supplication was particularly directed to be made, yet we enjoying the New Testament Dispensation, are encouraged to come to the throne of grace, through Jesus the Mediator (that Altar and Temple which sanctifieth every gift); in whom God's name is, and through whom believers have unspeakably more access; having blessings to plead for with God founded on the covenant established on better promises, and a better Mediator: tho'

* See 2 Chron. vi. 28, 29. and vii. 13, 14, &c.

New Testament promises are more explicit and absolute with regard to spiritual blessings and privileges, yet they do not exclude temporal mercies and deliverances, which are also within the sphere of what the believer may comprehend in prayer, when, like Jacob he wrestles with his God, saying, *I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.* Though he has not such assured grounds to expect success with the latter, as in the former case; yea, though the Lord should see fit to deny him that particular temporal favour or deliverance asked either for himself or others, still the Lord will not withhold that which is really good; and assuredly good will shall come to the Christian, even tho' judgments should befall a guilty land, and he may not be exempted from his share in them.

BUT, have we not good reason to expect that the continuance of public judgments would be removed by the united efforts of a praying people?—With regard to spiritual blessings which are accompanied with the most absolute promises to the Israel of God, still it is said, *I will yet for this be enquired of*

of by the house of Israel, to do it for them *; and can it be less proper to seek the Lord by prayer for averting those judgments, or bestowing those temporal favours which are more generally intimated in the word of God? Is there not reason to believe and hope that the Lord would honour prayer in removing impending judgments, and bestowing needed temporal good things in answer to the united requests of humble and earnest supplicants at a throne of grace? When, then, the weight of heavy calamities press down a land or city, and the scourge continues many days without intermission, it looks, as in the case of Sodom, as if there were but few intercessors in such places. The breaking out of sin is generally answered by the breaking in of judgment: and when there are few or none, Phineas-like, to stand in the breach, the flood-gates of wrath will open wide, and judgments continue to spread, agreeably to God's declaration by the Prophet Ezekiel, *I sought for a man among them that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found*

* Ezek. xxxvi. 36.

none. Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them, I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath; their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord God *. How threatening an aspect, then, does a state or people wear when all the wrestlers are cut off, who stood between God and impending judgments! As when a garrison is besieged, after the assailants have been beaten back, and their undaunted efforts frustrated, by the noble heroes within standing in the breach; yet, if these, at length, should be not only thinned, but fallen down to the ground, the enemies troops must, of course, enter, and destruction spread around. Thus as it would be an irreparable loss to a besieged city, when its boldest warriors are cut off, still more so to a guilty land and nation when its wrestlers with God in prayer are removed. To this the Psalmist seems to have respect when he saith, *Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men* †.

* Ezek. xxii. 30, 31.

† Ps. xii. 1.

BUT.

BUT, lest a difficulty may arise in the minds of some, from what has now been advanced, let it be carefully observed, that the turning away of threatened judgments, in answer to the prayers of God's people, is no objection against the steadiness of God's counsels; affords no indication of their being variable, or as if our prayers could cause the immutable Jehovah to change his purposes and decrees. The reason I assign for this, is, because these prayers are a part of the decree where God designs to suspend, or avert the execution of deserved judgments.

JUST as in the case of Hezekiah's illness, when the Prophet warned him from God, saying, *Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live*; yet when Hezekiah prayed and besought the Lord, the Lord heard his prayer, and directed him by the Prophet to take a lump of figs, and lay it on the boil, and he recovered *.

THE application of these figs was the appointed and necessary means for his cure,

* 2 Kings xx. 1—7.

and

and was as much ordained of God as the warning he received respecting his death.

THUS when men are stirred up to frequent and fervent prayer, either for themselves or others; this, to enlightened Christians, becomes the unfolding of the divine purposes, and disclosing what might formerly lay hid in the impenetrable decree, that God was about to save and to deliver.

FROM this powerful wrestling with God in prayer, we see that he hath determined to shew mercy; and as the forerunner, yea, as the means of it, hath, as in the case of Hezekiah, poured out a spirit of supplication, in answer to which deliverance may justly be expected to come. Thus, for example, in a season of great drought, none can tell what God designs to do, and whether he may not prevent the corn from shooting up and yielding its wonted increase; but should he be pleased to send the former and the latter rain, we conclude that there will be a plentiful harvest; because the one is the sign, the forerunner, and the appointed means of effecting the other: — Such is
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the nature and efficacy of prayer in obtaining safety and deliverance from national and deserved judgments; yea, the prayer, in such a case, is as much a part of the decree as the deliverance itself.

As God can never deny himself, or be unfaithful to his promises; so we may rest assured that he will never forsake a praying people. But I am lead now,

Thirdly, to enforce the obligation which is laid upon Christians, Moses-like, to wrestle with God for averting his displeasure from a sinful, revolting people.

1. They are the persons that have interest at the Court of heaven; and the influence they have ought to be made use of for so important a purpose.

THE children of God are permitted and encouraged to come with a holy freedom, and gracious familiarity to the throne of their heavenly Father, who can ill deny them what they ask for agreeable to his will.

SOMETIMES

SOMETIMES among men, this is among the last shifts that is adopted in attempting to prevail on one that is a father to bestow favours, or remove displeasure, to get his son to become an intercessor: nor was he unacquainted with human nature who took with him the son, though an infant, when he went in to the father to ask a favour he very much desired.

IT is no presumption, then, if put among the children, to supplicate God on behalf of ourselves and others. Yea, the Lord loves and expects to hear the cries of his people, when he is laying on the rod of his visitation. 'Tis for this end, among others, that *through Christ we have access by one spirit unto the Father*; 'tis for this end that the *spirit maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God*, and that your glorious Mediator, Jesus our great High Priest, stands with his *golden censer* before the throne *offering up the prayers of the saints with the much incense* of his own merits.

If then, you wish to have an additional mark of your interest in God; of your being a partaker of his grace, and zealous in
his

his service, you will be *lifting up holy hands without doubting*, that he will grant you the prayer you offer on behalf of your fellow men, for *this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour*. And we may venture to assert, that he who seldom prays for others, is but little heard for himself. There are few evidences more to be depended on than this spirit of intercessory prayer for others. If you are truly concerned for God's glory; if you have any love for your fellow men; and if ever you were in earnest about your own salvation, you cannot but be a wrestler with God on behalf of others.

2. If ye yourselves, Christians, received the grace of God when afar off, can ye be without bowels of compassion towards those who continue in the same dangerous state, *in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity*? Is it allowable to solicit the Lord of the vineyard for a respite to the sentence denounced against the fruitless tree? Who are so fit to plead for forbearance, as they who are so much indebted to God for so much of it shewn towards themselves? Whose bowels so likely to be moved towards sinners in a dangerous or perishing condition,

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as theirs who have themselves known the *wormwood and the gall* of an unconverted state? Can the real Christian, then, be without concern for his near and dear relations, for his neighbours, for the Church of Christ, for the nation at large, or for the generation that is to come? Is it a matter of no moment to such whether their relations and neighbours be partakers of the same grace? Whether the interests of the Church of Christ flourish or decay? Whether the nation be visited with mercies or with judgments? Whether posterity enjoy the same civil and religious liberties? The continuance of a gospel-ministry? Freedom to worship God according to his word, and the dictates of conscience?

SURELY no one, who is, even in the smallest degree, blessed with a spirit like that of Moses, can, upon such points, be without concern, or can refrain from supplicating the Lord that he would visit, not with a curse, but with a blessing!

3. I AM led farther to add upon this head, that the mediation of Christ, so far from discour-

discouraging, is a mighty excitement unto Christians to act the part of intercessors for others.

FAR be it from us to suppose that the saints are mediators of themselves, or that any can succeed in prayer, either for themselves or others, without respect to the intercession of Christ!

BUT a believing view to this glorious intercessor is a strong encouragement to the prayers of the saints, when they remember that they are as advocates engaged on the same side with the Mediator of the New Testament, urging the same motives, and adducing the same arguments in prayer on earth, with Jesus who is for ever before the throne of God; and that his name and worthiness which they make use of, and plead, can, and will obtain for them every desirable blessing. And

4. THE Christian has this for his farther encouragement, that whatever be the success of his prayers for others, they shall not return empty of good to himself; for as *he*

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that watereth shall be watered also himself; so he that frequently and unfeignedly prays for good to others, shall find, in experience, the advantage of it to his own soul.

AND how truly pleasing must the review be of that time spent in fervent supplication to the God of love, who is the hearer and the answerer of prayer! How happy the seasons when the soul has been burning pure incense upon God's altar! How sweet and affecting a sight must it have been for a Jewish believer to stand on Mount Zion and behold those pillars of smoke which arose from the sacrifices of the temple! But how much more when faith now beholds a purer offering ascending as grateful incense before God, even the prayers of the saints, presented on that altar which sanctifieth every gift, and thus coming up with acceptance before a holy God!

I N F E R E N C E S.

1. MAY we not infer from the scripture-history recorded in our text, that God's Israel, whether in Old or New Testament times, are not exempted from their lot in suffering,

suffering, because involved in their share of sinning against God.

WITHOUT the interposition of Moses, wrath had come upon revolting Israel. So far is God from seeing no sin in his own people to be displeased at, or to rebuke for it, that the Apostle intimates, *judgment must begin at the house of God*: and though there should be a nation of saints, yet this is no security that there shall be a freedom from national judgments; for *if his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes, &c.* In some respects sin is more odious and provoking in God's people than in others. Let none then think themselves out of the reach of danger. *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation. Stand in awe, and sin not.*

2. HENCE we may also infer, that the Lord is merciful and gracious, since he hath not consumed such a sinful people as we are, among whom his mercy is slighted, and his

justice as much defied as by Israel in the wilderness. The Lord's mercy endureth for ever, and from generation to generation. Let this consideration engage us to trust in, to love, and to serve him.

3. HENCE also we may see that there must be yet a goodly remnant left in the land of those who fear the Lord, and tremble at his judgments.

How justly may it be said, that if there had not been such a remnant left unto us by the Lord of Hosts, *we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.* The same causes will produce similar effects; and, but for the power of prayer which will always prevail, surely we had been overwhelmed under an inundation of judgments!

4. How unspeakable, then, is the encouragement which the people of God have, in all times of distress and calamity, to entreat the Lord for his forbearing mercy!

How amiable does the character of Moses appear, standing, as it were, in the breach
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—interceeding on the behalf of his guilty brethren—preferring the honour of his God, and the safety of the nation, before his own temporal advancement and grandeur!

IF the Lord hearkened to the intercession of Moses, and was entreated to turn away from *the evil which he thought to do unto his people*; may not those who have imbibed a portion of the same spirit which was in this man of God, take encouragement to wrestle with God in prayer, on behalf of a sinful people, with similar hopes of success? There is a kind of omnipotence in the prayer of faith, so that they who, with a holy violence, besiege the throne of grace, shall not go without a blessing either for themselves or others. O then give him no rest day or night, till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth, till vice and wickedness hide their heads, that iniquity may not prove our ruin; and till *righteousness run down our streets as a mighty stream*! Besides the encouragement derived from the example and success of Moses recorded in our text, let me remind you of the declaration of the Apostle JAMES, *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man*

availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years, and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit *. Yes, my brethren, the Lord hath in every age manifested himself to be a God hearing and answering prayer.

TO CONCLUDE. If such men of prayer as *Moses* and *Elias* are so useful among a sinful people; on the other hand, what unprofitable, yea, pernicious members of society must they be, who are daily adding to the guilt of a land, without ever aiming to ward off the blow, or praying to God either on their own behalf, or of their fellow sinners! Surely such cannot expect an interest in God's favour on earth, and living and dying in such a careless, sinful, prayerless state, they stand exposed to all the dreadful consequences of a just judgment to come!

* James v. 16—18.

S E R M O N VII.

MATTHEW XXIII. 37.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the Prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy Children together, even as a Hen gathereth her Chickens under her wings, and ye would not.

HE who made Man, knows well the readiest way of access to the human heart: He who fitted up the apartment, and locked the doors, can frame a key that will fit all the wards. Though He dwells in the high and holy place, such is his affection to us, that He earnestly desires a residence within our breasts, and has from age to age been employing the most likely and effectual means to obtain his purpose. How many

messengers did he send on this errand! How many prophets did he commission! At last his own Son bows the heavens, and comes down, takes upon himself the form of a servant, and is made in the likeness of men. Perfect virtue appears in our world, perfect goodness becomes visible to human eyes. The only begotten of the Father is seen full of grace and truth. He speaks, as never man spake. The grace of persuasion is poured without measure into his lips. He comes to his own; but his own receive him not: he knocks, but they refuse admittance. He spreads abroad his sheltering wings, but they will not betake themselves to the covert of them for safety. A deep and painful sense of their folly draws from his heart the words of the text, *O Jerusalem, &c.*

IN discoursing to you from these words I shall

I. POINT out the affectionate tenderness of the Lord Jesus Christ, as it is here represented in the text.

II. SHEW, that fallen creatures can only be safe when gathered under his wings.

III. Ex-

III. EXPOSE the folly of those that refuse to listen to his voice.

1. I SHALL point out the affectionate tenderness of our Lord Jesus Christ to the sons of men.

NONE I think can doubt of it after considering the following things:

1. His word and promise. *Come unto me* (says he, Matth. xi. 28.) *all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* (Again, John vi. 37.) *Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out;* and John vii. 37. *In the last day, that great day of the feast Jesus stood and cried, saying, if any man thirst let them come unto me and drink.* Read in these words the compassion of the Mediator's heart. 'Tis wonderful that his word should inspire so little confidence. Can we believe a man whose breath departs, whose thoughts change, believe a man who may lye, and deny credit to the God of truth speaking to us by his own Son? The promise of God is all the security that Angels have for the continuance of their felicity,
and

and it is all that they desire. Should it not fully satisfy us, and leave us to an humble, yet firm reliance on the tender compassion of Jesus Christ.

2. To give still stronger assurance, and banish all distrust, he has turned the dispensation of grace, and the promise of reconciliation into a covenant; that by two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie, they might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them. A covenant sealed with blood, not of beasts, nor of mortal man, though that has been accounted awfully solemn, but of the glorious Mediator between God and Man. A covenant ordered in all things and sure, in which all necessary provision is made for all ranks of sinners for all degrees of demerit, for all they need in time, of pardon and grace, and of glory through eternity. A covenant that has not a fallible head, as the head of the first covenant was; but one whom God has chosen, as every way qualified for the arduous work, one on whom he laid our help, and whom he made strong to stand. A covenant

venant that cannot be disannulled by the failures of man, since the surety has undertaken both for the payment of our debt, and for the performance of duty by us.

3. IN order to have all your doubts of his eagerness to gather souls under his wings removed, read his Testament, hear it proved, and consider well the legacies that it contains. Attend to one recorded in John xiv. 27. *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.* This kind of deed has been above all others sacred among men. Every nation, every legislator has treated it with singular respect. The executing of a will has been looked upon as one of the most solemn truths, a want of fidelity in it as a most heinous crime. Should the word covenant excite fear in any mind, from the idea of difficulty in performing the condition, a Testament which is a different kind of deed removes it. In a Testament it is not merit, but kindness; not good desert but favour; not purchase, equivalent or payment, but good will and friendship
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to him in whose behalf the Testament is made. This will is now opened. The contents are made known. Let none deprive themselves of the legacies that the Redeemer has left, and wrong their own souls. Tho' I cannot pronounce on your state, nor say that the blessings of the gospel are yours, till you actually believe in the Name of the Son of God: yet I say to all who hear the words of this salvation, to persons of every age, sex, rank and degree, that the Redeemer is earnest to gather you under his wings, and to bestow upon you wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. He invites you to receive these blessings from his hands. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear, and O give not the Redeemer cause to complain of you as he did of Old Jerusalem. *I would have gathered you in, but ye would not.*

4. THE tender compassion of the Redeemer's heart, which he has wonderfully displayed. Ever since the fall his delight has been with the sons of men, and in every age his mercy has been shewn. At last the word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us.

Univer-

Universal peace that first of blessings, mark the entrance of the God of peace. As soon as he came on the stage of public life, he breathed nothing but love, every accent was pity, every act was grace. Bear testimony all ye who have read the gospels, was ever life like Christ's. He went about continually doing good. It was his meat and drink to do the will of his Father in heaven. Never did he lose sight of this grand point; the gathering of souls under his wings. He constantly glorified God, but it was by seeking after, finding, bringing back and restoring to his favour guilty and miserable man. What sincerity, what ardour, what earnestness did he discover in this divine work! Or the wonderful compassion of his heart may be proved thus. We argue from the effect to the cause. We believe there is heat in the sun, because his distant rays warm this earth. In the inferior creatures, the beasts of the field, and the fowls of the air, we discover tenderness for their young. The human nature possesses pity and affection in a very considerable degree. To their offspring, this principle acts with amazing force. *Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she*

she should not have compassion on the fruit of her womb. And the pity or tender affection of a father for his children, what words can express? Nor is this affection planted so near to the surface in the soil of the human heart, that it may be plucked up, or rooted out at pleasure. Thousands have attempted it in vain. They have found to their cost, that this root cannot be destroyed, while life remains. If there be so much affection in one heart, how much must there be in the whole human race? Add to this all the affection that is in the hearts of all the tribes of Angels. Suppose it all collected in one breast: what tenderness of pity, what ardour of love resides there. Yet it bears no proportion to the affection to man which reigns in the heart of Jesus Christ. It is but as a particle of dust to the globe of the earth, as a drop of water to the ocean, nay, it is as finite to infinite.

5. THE character of many of those whom he has gathered. A view of this must convince us, that if his heart were not strongly set on making men happy, he never would have admitted such persons into his favour.

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There is none on earth innocent ; there is none righteous, no, not one. The degrees of guilt are exceedingly different. But Christ has not rejected the worst. He has gathered them under his wings from the highways hedges, publicans, harlots, and transgressors of the most odious kind. The blessing of many millions ready to perish has come upon him. Could you but see the citizens of the new Jerusalem, you would perceive thousands once black with the foulest stains of guilt, now whiter than snow. David, who was guilty of adultery, and murder ; Paul, who persecuted the Church, and Peter who denied his Master, with oaths and imprecations, shine bright in the kingdom of heaven. Read the list of the persons whom Christ gathered under his wings at Corinth. You will find it in the first Epistle of Paul to that Church, chap. vi. 9, 10. *Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate abusers of themselves with mankind, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners.* Such had some of the Corinthian converts been ; but, *They were washed, they were sanctified, they were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God.* With this view of things

things before our eyes, can we possible doubt of the Redeemer's willingness and earnest desire to gather souls under his wings.

THE considerations that have been suggested, do, I hope, clearly prove the affectionate tenderness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that he is exceedingly desirous to save the souls of men. I proceed

II. To shew that fallen creatures can then only be safe, when they are gathered under the wings of Jesus Christ.

A CREATURE is and must be dependent. Its life is derived from another, and is every moment at the disposal of the Creator. Were he for one moment to suspend his influence, the creature would sink into nothing again. As all beings both innocent and guilty thus depend on God, the guilty should seek without delay to be at peace with him. To no other quarter can he look for safety. The whole creation is in arms against a sinner. The universe takes the part of God against him. If he look upward or downward, on the right hand, or on the left, and cry out
for

for help. Each would answer: *Shelter is not in me.* There is no rock, no cavern where the worker of iniquity can hide himself from God. If God do not take pity on the guilty, the unhappy creature must be miserable and abandoned, and left to perish without remedy. No wing but that of Jesus Christ can afford shelter to the guilty: no where can a fallen creature be safe but under his protection. This will appear from the following particulars.

1. THERE is no safety elsewhere, because till the soul betakes itself to Christ, its guilt remains. Guilt is an inseparable bar in the way of a creature's happiness. Justice and truth pursue the transgressor, and will sooner or later find him out; whatever attempts he may make to conceal himself from their notice, and elude their discovery; and when he is found out, the deserved punishment shall be inflicted on him to the full, and he shall in no wise be set free till he has paid the uttermost farthing. Where then shall man flee for succour? Under what wing shall he find shelter? To many places of refuge have men gone; and Christ is of-

ten the last they have recourse to. But all others are refugees of lies, that the hail shall sweep away. Be assured there can be no acceptable intercourse with God, unless reconciliation first take place; and there can be no reconciliation without a satisfaction, a full satisfaction. And what satisfaction could man make to the injured honours of the divine government, and redeem himself, or his brother from death and misery? The work is far above man, the work infinitely too difficult for him. Christ alone could, and did perform it; and on that account he alone is the refuge of the soul.

2. THERE is no safety elsewhere, because it is only under the wings of Christ, that the divine life is produced and cherished till it arrive at maturity and perfection. *I am,* (says Christ, John xi. 25, 26.) *The resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.* In the same gospel, (chap. v. 40.) He says to the Jews, *Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life.* Do not these words plainly hold for this important truth, that

that in Christ alone life is to be found, and that from him alone it can be obtained? He alone is the life of immortal souls. As there is no God but the Great Jehovah, the creator of heaven and of earth, and the idols of the heathen are vanity and a lye; so there is no Saviour but Jesus Christ; and all other pretenders to the office are physicians of no value. We have the fullest authority from scripture, in Acts iv. 12. to assert, *that there is not salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.* Though there be many ways of destruction, there is but one way of salvation. Though there be many ways of wounding the soul, there is but one way of healing it. Though there be many things that will poison the soul, there is but one antidote. Tho' there be many stumbling blocks to throw man down into misery, there is but one hand that can raise him up. Though there be many to occasion death, there is but one that can give life.

3. THE soul is now here also safe from the assaults of the enemies of its salvation. Our foes had led us captive and maintained

dominion over us. Who but Christ could take the prey out of the hand of the Mighty? Who but Christ could drag the usurper down from the throne of the human heart on which he sat? Who but Christ could recover possession of the soul, after it had long been held in the most abject slavery? Who but Christ could overcome the strong one, who vanquished Adam in innocence; and led his posterity captive? Now that believers are delivered from the power of their spiritual enemies, it is Christ who enables them to baffle those attempts, that their enemies make to bring them again into subjection and bondage. They thrust fore at the Christian, that he may fall; but the Lord Jesus helps him. The Lord is his strength and his salvation. All that are afar off from him, shall perish. When his saints wander from him, they are wounded by their foes: and how many retain the scars that still appear from wounds they received, when trusting to themselves, or inattentive to their situation, they left their divine Protector. But under the shadow of his wings they may boldly say, *I will not fear though thousands should encamp against me.* But in every

every other place, they are exposed to their foes, and their destruction is certain, and cannot be avoided by all their power and skill. Where then can sinners be safe but in Christ?

III. I SHALL expose the folly of those who refuse to listen to Christ's voice.

SUCH a conduct shews folly in the highest degree. All sin is in scripture called foolishness. This species may be called so by way of eminence.

1. As it prefers lies to the truth. It prefers a refuge of lies to that refuge, which God hath provided, the moving sand of the sea, to that strong foundation laid in Zion, and that which is nought, to the fine gold tried in the fire, to the unsearchable riches treasured up in the Redeemer. 'Tis setting Christ at nought; 'tis regretting and despising him who is the rest of the soul. After the rest of the first of the human race was broken by sin, and the rest of the typical Canaan was at an end, God rested in Christ his beloved Son, and in him was well pleas-

ed. Accordingly they that believe in Christ, are said to enter into God's rest, because having just and well founded sentiments of him formed in their hearts. They acquiesce entirely in him, and there lose all the anxieties and cares which distracted them before.

2. As it chuses death, rather than life. It prefers ruin to safety: it is leaping from the lofty precipice upon sharp-pointed rocks below. Unspeakably great was the mercy of God; in favouring us with the promise of salvation, after we were exposed to misery by reason of sin. To send his own Son into the world to save us, what compassion! For men to reject his Son, O what madness! 'Tis like courting misery, and using endeavours to render their destruction sure. *This is their condemnation, that light is come into the world, but they love darkness, rather than light, because their deeds are evil, (John iii. 19.) If he who despised Moses' law died without mercy: of how much sorer punishment, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath done despite unto the spirit of grace. What remains for him, but a fearful looking for*
judg-

judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall consume the adversaries of Jehovah. What man of wisdom, for all that the world could offer, would run blindfold on the top of Mount Etna, just by the mouth of its dreadful volcano? Rejecting Christ is infinitely greater folly; it seals the sinner's doom, it ratifies his condemnation, it makes his eternal misery sure.

3. As it prefers time to eternity. It must be some temporal interest, some sensual gratification wherewith Satan has allured thee, else thou wouldst have been all attention to Jesus Christ, and wouldst have said to him, *To whom, Lord, shall I go but unto thee; for thou hast the words of eternal life.* Who, not blinded by the God of this world, would ever hold the scales, one moment in his hand, while God and the world were weighed in the balance, against the world and its enjoyments? What can the world promise you, that will equal the pleasure to be tasted in the friendship of God? Can you insure worldly prosperity to yourself? How uncertain are all the good things of a present life! But I shall suppose you successful in

the pursuit of prosperity. What vexation, what disquietude, what anxiety is mingled with it. Men are pleased with the external appearance, and call you happy; but if they could see the heart of the most prosperous man, they would very often change their sentiments, and rank him amongst the most miserable of the human race. What will the world do for you in future? Should you continue to possess it, till you have the revolution of fourscore years; that period will soon arrive. Our years pass away as a tale that is told, they are swifter than the post. Then must you go to a place where riches profit not, and there remain destitute of all enjoyment, and racked with bitter remorse for evermore.

4. As it prefers husks to the bread of life. This made divine wisdom of old put the question: *Why spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that satisfieth not.* It costs not the Christian so much anxiety and trouble of mind to save the soul, as you to ruin it. He is not so much agitated and tormented in seeking rest, as you are in going down to misery. He has
already

already entered into rest, and enjoys it in a considerable degree. Your mind is as a bone out of joint; it is as the troubled sea which cannot rest, but is continually throwing forth mire and dirt. 'Tis granted, that Satan represents the Christian life as a melancholy and wretched state, and his agents circulate the falshood, and make it pass for a current truth. Amidst the hours of mirth and jollity, they bless themselves in their freedom from religion, and despise the Christian. But how much nobler is his pleasure, than yours: how much sweeter and purer his enjoyments! A pleasing tranquility of mind to which you are a stranger, reigns within his breast. When conscience is pained with the remembrance of past sins: with the eyes of faith he looks to the blood of Jesus, and desires forgiveness thence, and peace. When he directs his views into the eternal world, he is filled with the well-grounded hope of an inheritance that is uncorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Those duties of religion that you think so irksome and so painful to him, are the most pleasing employments of his life: they spring from love to his Father in heaven;

heaven; and they create in his heart more gladness, than the man of the world has, when his corn and wine and oil most abound. Are you not then justly chargeable with the highest folly?

5. THE folly of your conduct in refusing to listen to Christ, further appears, as you will thereby infallibly lose your precious soul. The Christian is safe. He can lose nothing. His happiness is secured by the covenant, and promises of the faithful God. Your misery is made equally certain by the threatnings of his word. When Jeremiah of old was thrown into the dungeon, and he stuck fast in the mire, cords were let down to his assistance, and he was drawn out. But no cord of salvation is let down into that pit where no water is, to set free the condemned transgressor. Of old in the wilderness, God smote the rock, and water gushed out in abundance to quench the thirst of the host of Israel; but the rich man in hell who lifted up his eyes, being in torments, could not procure one drop of water to cool his parched tongue. Take the Christian out of a present world he can lose nothing.

nothing. Death will convey him to heaven, and there his treasure is, there is his eternal home; there is his Saviour, there his God, and his all. Your all is here: without the boundaries of a present world you have nothing. He runs no risque in going out of this world to another: he is already born into it, he has embibed the spirit of it, he breathes the life of it, and is well acquainted with its joys. You go to a strange world indeed, seized by the hand of death, and dragged out of the only element of sensual gratification, to a place where there is nothing suitable to the wants of your soul. When death breaks the chains of mortality, he passes into perfect happiness, as naturally as the infant advances to maturity, or as the bud opens into the full blown rose. You are a vessel of wrath fitted for destruction, and must dwell for ever with devouring fire, and in the everlasting burnings. Behold, saith the Lord God, in Isa. lxx. 13, 14. *My servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and howl for vexation of spirit.*

HAVING

HAVING thus endeavoured to illustrate the several heads of discourse, I shall now conclude with some inferences. And

1. Is the Redeemer so intent in gathering sinners under the shadow of his wings, here is great encouragement to all to betake themselves to him. There is no reason for any to despair. Has he pledged his truth in so many promises. Has he given us the liveliest example of tenderness and affection? Did he descend from heaven to earth, and put off the glory that he had with the Father before the world was? Did he clothe himself in the garments of human nature, and bow his head so low? Was his visage marred more than any man's, and did he give up his life a ransom for us on the accursed tree? And after this, who can question the sincerity of his promise, and the uprightness of his heart, in the invitations that he gives? What an affront to him to say, you think he is not sincere. Had he only permitted us to trust in him, it would have justly been accounted a singular favour, and a great encouragement. But besides a permission we are invited, we are called, nay,

we are commanded to believe in Christ, and to expect salvation from him. Does any one say, the invitation is not particularly addressed to me? True, but you are not excepted. The invitations to the gospel-feast are given to all. You are invited in common with the rest that hear the gospel. Some indeed are particularly described in the invitations of our Lord, the hungry, the weary, the labouring, the heavy-laden, and particular encouragement is given to them. But that others are not excluded, the word of Christ plainly declares in the following expressions. *Whosoever will let him come and take of the water of life freely,* (Rev. xxii. 17.) *And him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out,* (John vi. 37.) I may therefore say to you, what the multitude that followed Christ, said to a blind man that implored relief. *Arise, go to him, for he calleth thee.* Apply to him without delay; and consider for your encouragement, that Christ never rejected any that applied to him for help, when he dwelt here below; and that whosoever believeth in him, hath everlasting life.

2. INFINITELY are ye indebted to Christ, who are already gathered under his wings. He not only has called you externally to come to him, but by the internal operation of his spirit has brought your hearts to a compliance with the call. Perhaps you once imagined there was little difficulty in coming to Jesus Christ, and attempted it in nature's strength. But now you are fully convinced, that it was God who wrought in you to will, and to do of his good pleasure; and that though it was absolutely necessary for you to attend to the external call, it would, without the influences of the holy spirit, have been altogether ineffectual. Have you reason to judge that Christ is formed in you? Rejoice in his love, and your happy state. For a Christian to be always doubting his Saviour's love to his soul, when he has sufficient evidences to convince him of it, is exceedingly unsuitable. It spreads a gloom over his soul, and is attended with a variety of unhappy effects. When you feel the soul drawn to Christ, and the heart closing with him, and acquiescing to his fullness and all-sufficiency, and having respect to all his commandments, rejoice in him who has called

called you out of darkness into his marvellous light, and who has given you assurance, that he who hath begun a good work in you, will carry it on, and perfect it unto the day of Christ.

3. WRETCHED is the situation of those who are not gathered under the wings of Christ: who can describe a right your guilt and danger: you are treasuring up to yourselves wrath against the day of wrath. You are enemies to God in your minds by wicked works, you lose the truest joy. You spend your labour for that which satisfieth not. You are laying up matter of remorse and bitter anguish. You are displeasing and resisting the spirit of God. You are hardening others by your example. The day of your merciful visitation is drawing to an end, the sun is going down, but the journey of life is not begun. The things that belong to your peace, if they are not already, may soon be hid from your eyes. But however dangerous and alarming your situation is, still there is hope, you are in the land of the living, and your glass still runs. Tho' I am afraid in regard to some, and dread
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the consequence of your long continuance in an impenitent state, yet I have no warrant to say concerning any individual: *Thou art the man whom God hath rejected, and the things that belong to thy peace, are for ever hid from thine eyes.* Nor have any of you reason to draw this conclusion, in regard to yourselves. You are still invited by the voice of Jesus Christ: wisdom still crieth after you: *How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity. Turn ye at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit upon you, I will make known my words unto you,* (Prov. i. 22, 23.) Should any one who is trembling on the brink of despair, say to me, *You exceed your commission in inviting me to partake of mercy, for I am cast off for ever.* I reply, however great your iniquities may be, yet unto you do I call, and entreat you to consider it as a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus is come into the world to save even the chief of sinners.

4. THEY are utterly inexcusable who refuse to listen to the voice of Jesus Christ, and the justice of God will be clearly mani-

manifested in their destruction. God spake of old to Israel on Mount Sinai. Was it not the duty of all to hear? From age to age he sent his servants to reprove his people for their sins, and to call them to repentance. But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his own Son, who is the heir of all things, and by whom also he made the worlds. Ought not men to listen to the voice of the Son of God bringing them glad tidings of great joy: to wit, *That God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing men's trespasses unto them.* This is the cause of men's condemnation, that light is come into the world, and they have loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. Let none say, *Men cannot by their own power change their own hearts.* This is true, but it is not to the purpose. Though Israel of old entered not into Canaan because of unbelief, it was not because they could not divide Jordan, and throw down the walls of Jericho: but because they despised their deliverance, believed not God's power, would not commit themselves to his care, and remained in their hearts attached to the slavery and idols of Egypt. Thus the

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despisers

despisers of Christ shall perish without excuse, not because they cannot make atonement for their own guilt, and create their hearts anew; but because they have not the Son, because they despise an infinitely more glorious deliverance than that of Israel, and in spite of all warnings, prefer the slavery of Satan and the world, and their lusts, to Jesus Christ, and his salvation, and will not come to him that they may have life.

To conclude. How wonderful is the patience of our Lord Jesus Christ in bearing so long with ungrateful men, after they have despised and rejected him again and again. Notwithstanding the unkind usage, he has met with, he still invites men to come to him that they may find rest to their souls. Ye that have hitherto rejected him, betake yourselves to him without delay, and implore his pity and his grace. Ye that have received Christ Jesus the Lord, and are safe under the shadow of his wings, abide in him and shew forth his praise, and glorify him in your body, and in your spirit which are his.

S E R.

S E R M O N VIII.

H E B R E W S III. 13.

But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

DECEIT and imposition are the aversion of most men, and the impostor is held in just detestation. If persons, through ignorance or credulity, have been once imposed on, they are naturally put more upon their guard afterwards, especially against the same man. But this remark only holds true in matters of inferior concern; for who has not been times innumerable imposed on by sin, and yet, at the same time, remained unsuspicious of danger from that quarter? It appears, therefore, far from being an useless or unprofitable subject to caution both young and old, and to *exhort, while it is*

180 SIN'S HARDENING TENDENCY.

called to-day, lest any of you be hardened thro' the deceitfulness of sin. Here we shall take occasion,

I. To shew how justly sin is styled *deceitful*.

II. POINT out the woeful tendency which sin indulged has to harden.

III. URGE an attention to the means of prevention proposed by the Apostle: *exhort one another daily, &c.*

I. I SHALL shew how justly sin may be styled deceitful.

1. BECAUSE it varies its appearance, takes a different name, and shews itself under one disguise or another, and all with a view to deceive.

How often does sin take the name of some cardinal virtue, and shelter itself from pursuit and censure under the shadow of some commendable quality.—*Revenge* calls itself spirit:—*Pride*, so offensive to God,—is behaving according to dignity and rank:
—*Covet-*

—*Covetousness*, which is idolatry,—is frugality, care for one's family, &c.—exorbitant gain, *usury*, and taking advantage of our neighbour,—is only taking good profit:—*Slander*, which is stabbing the reputation of another,—is only repeating what others have said, and expressing sorrow for another's conduct.—*Prodigality*, which is waste and profusion,—is only enjoying and taking the use of the bounties of Providence.—*Impurity*, and the violation of chastity,—are accounted acts of gallantry:—*squandering* way precious *time*, and forgetting the interests of the soul, and a better world,—is enjoying life: discarding every thing serious from conversation,—is polite behaviour,

IF then we conceive an unfavourable opinion of the man who has changed his name, and suspect that he does so in order to conceal his past ill conduct, or to screen him from the consequences of meditated evil; why should we remain without indignation at sin, which practices so common a fraud and deception on the souls of men? But,

2. WHEN this piece of craft is too glaring, and its real nature appears, then it solicits admittance into the heart under pretence of its being a little sin, and thus the soul may be imposed on to give it room.

WHEN once this imposition succeeds, then the sinner pleads as *Lot for Zoar, is it not a little one, and my soul shall live?* Or as *Naaman's* servants argued to bring him to yield to the Prophet's advice, that it was but a small matter that was required. Under this delusion the sinner pleads, that he may, at least for once, take this or that liberty, follow the bent of nature, yield to the importunity and example of others, or the unavoidable temptations of his place or state, whilst he stops short of that excess of sin into which others run. Oh how often is conscience, the guard at the gate of the heart, duped by such artifices! How many, partly thro' ignorance, and partly thro' the violence of their passions, are thus blinded, and stumble, and fall! And yet there is no possible suggestion more opposite to truth; for in the whole circle of commanded duty, included either in the first or the second table of the law, there is no transgression
which

which can be properly called a little sin. Each exposes to the wrath of God; each leads to eternal destruction; wounds conscience; and entails the curse of an angry God. — Ask an awakened sinner, tossed with tempests under the apprehension of the wrath of God;—ask the Christian who, on this account, has been broken-hearted, and all his bones, as it were, out of joint:—ask those whose name may be called *Magor-Mis abib*, who have felt terror of conscience on account of sin, and been brought out of despair; and if this question is put to them what is sin? They will, with one voice, pronounce it the greatest of all possible evils.

3 How often does sin obtain admittance by insinuating, that it is but for once-for-a-day, or a season, till this, or the other important scene is accomplished.

BUT who knows not that sin is a downhill road; and that when once it finds entrance, the hedge is broken down, and every fresh indulgence renders the next so much easier, so that the resistance becomes daily more feeble, till at last conscience is overpowered? Then *may the Ephio*

his skin, or the Leopard his spots, when they that are accustomed to do evil learn to do well. As the garrison, while the enemy is kept without, resistance is practicable; but if a few are admitted, the danger and difficulty become much greater. 'Tis in this view, especially, that the Apostle represents sin as deceitful; and the experience of many abundantly confirms the observation. On this account we are repeatedly urged to watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation, and to resist the first approaches of our spiritual enemies; for if once we enter into a parley, defeat is certain. The Christian's whole safety, in some cases, consists in flight. When he feels a party within urging to him compliance, let him shun the spot, or the occasion of the attack, and seek for refuge in God. Let him turn away his ear from the sophistical insinuations of sin and Satan. By neglecting such wholesome advice many stumble and fall, and oftentimes has the shield of the warrior been cast away. Through a presumptuous conceit of inherent strength and courage, he has entered the lists with, and suffered a defeat from a cunning and experienced foe, too often successful.

4. THIS farther appears from the insinuations we meet with when tempted to sin;—as that the evil of it may soon be repented of!—that God is merciful and delights to pardon;—that he knows our weakness, and pities our infirmities;—that there are days enough to think of the evil of our ways, or the sins we have committed;—that it is but hypocrisy and enthusiasm to pretend to so much strictness of life;—that none can put off the bias of nature, or change their constitution;—and that one need not be afraid of that which may, in the decline of life, be undone and repented of. Am I not now speaking that very language to which you have had something similar whispering within you?

BUT what an imposition is this? Who but Satan the grand impostor, and the father of sin, ever suggested such pretences for the indulgence of sin? And tho' every one who thus flatters himself, may not be a cast-away; yet I affirm, that these pleas are some of the most prevalent and destructive engines by which Satan props up and supports his interest in the world: 'tis hereby
that

that the reign of sin is maintained on the ruins of precious souls. It becomes therefore of the greater service and utility to point out and guard against the danger of hearkening to such insinuations, and to be *exhorting one another daily, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

5. THE deceitfulness of sin may also be noticed, as it hides its deformity and draws a veil over its bitter ingredients and terrible consequences; as it lays on false colours, and holds out false lights; promises much of sublunary joy, and gives hopes of high felicity, yea, a heaven upon earth; just as Satan tempted Christ when he set before him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them. No deceit can exceed what sin practices in these respects; and though the experience of all past ages, added to every individual sinner's own, confirms the imposition, yet the deception still continues. Sin allures with the most flattering prospects, yet robs us of our choicest treasures; promises honour and pleasure, yet rewards with disgrace and torment; tempts with liberty, but binds with chains; offers felicity, but betrays

betrays to destruction and misery. Its path appears all strewed with flowers, but proves in the end to be the way to death.

How justly would an outcry be made against one in ordinary life who should promise much and perform nothing; who should draw in the unwary under the pretence of administering happiness, and yet impart misery; who should varnish empty baubles, and pass them off for sterling coin; who should promise security against dangerous consequences, and yet push over the precipice of destruction; or who should hide the most odious deformities, and commend them for beauties? But thus doth sin act in enticing, deceiving, and hardening the hearts of men.

6. If conscience arouses and is angry when temptation to sin is presented, it promises to retreat; but like the unclean spirit, with an intention to return soon again; and so as to leave a party behind. Oh how strongly does it plead with, and artfully attempt to bribe conscience before it withdraws! And when the feint is made for a
few

few days, it returns with a stronger force, and regains possession of the heart. How many deceitful promises are made on these occasions, and yet how little security do they afford to the soul! How many take the promise, and sit down contented, unapprized of the indefatigable endeavours of their spiritual enemies to injure and destroy their souls! Who can tell how many precious souls have been ruined by the many deceitful insinuations of sin and Satan! What day is there in which we may not discover new impositions practised by these enemies!

WE proceed now,

II. To point out the woeful tendency, which sin indulged has to harden the conscience.

1. THIS appears from the very nature of sin which is direct opposition and enmity to God; and this affords the strongest reason why we should take heed against it, and seek to pluck the viper from our bosom. Sin sets God and the sinner at variance. The latter, if not an Atheist, feels dread of God's wrath,

wrath, with some shame and faint remorse for having offended against him ; but upon the frequent repetition of sin every other principle vanishes, and the fear of vengeance is succeeded by hatred of God who stands in the sinner's way to restrain by his threatenings from the course he is determined to pursue, and because he will punish him for his criminal indulgences. Thus, thro' the deceitfulness of sin, every generous sentiment towards God is rooted up, and the heart is hardened in opposition to him.

2. SIN hardens inasmuch as every fresh indulgence gives new vigour to the old man, and weakens the resistance against it. Conscience, which at first remonstrated, becomes more and more faint in its censures, 'till at length its voice is hushed in the clamour which sin makes for indulgence, though a strict observer of every thought and action, and will take its own time to speak so much the louder.

As in many of the different Arts and Trades, it is use which strengthens and habituates the body or mind to render the calling easy ;
so

so the longer any one treads in the unhappy road of sin, the smoother it grows; the oftener he yields, the more is the habit of sinning strengthened. 'Tis this hardening of the heart, through indulgence in sin, that renders the work of conversion so arduous, and the pangs of the new-birth so painful; which becomes as the *cutting off a right hand, or the plucking out a right eye*. — Reflect farther,

3. ON the agency of Satan in conjunction with sinful propensities, to deceive, and then to harden the heart.

SATAN takes occasion from the innate depravity, and the evil propensities of the children of men, to insinuate his temptations, and like one in quiet possession of a fortress or palace, to go in and out at pleasure. He can have no better handle to harden and ruin the souls of men, than that which the love of sin in the heart affords him. Were there no depravity or sin there, he could have no possession, therefore, when he came to tempt Christ, we are told, *he found nothing in him*.

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BUT, with regard to all others, they carry traitors in their own bosoms, and hence they so readily yield to Satan the dominion over them. Sin on this account woefully hardens, inasmuch as Satan by means of this internal corrupt principle, successfully pushes on his attacks by temptations presented from without. Thus is the sinner led on from bad to worse; he becomes more and more the child of the devil who draws his own image on the heart; demolishes those sentiments that are opposite to his own diabolical suggestions; renders the unhappy man more and more callous to the voice of the heavenly charmer, and all the means of grace appointed by infinite wisdom. Satan casts new cords, as it were, around the sinner, entangles him in his strong nets, and thus at length fastens more firmly on his prey.

4. THAT sin hardens through its deceitfulness is farther apparent from sad observation.

WHO has not observed, *a youth void of understanding*, and heard of, or beheld the resistance made on the first onset of sinful

ful temptation, when conscience was vigorous; when the barriers of a religious education were to be broken through; and when his principles seemed a powerful fence? But sin by degrees sapped these foundations; so that though at first he started back, and replied to the tempter in the words of *Hazael*, *Is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing*; yet, with him, he is led on to do the same, and still more heinous iniquities in a short time. Who has not heard of the reluctance, and the severe struggle between the temptations of Satan and the dictates of conscience which has taken place before the first criminal acts of theft, robbery, lewdness, perjury, and the like; and the bitter anguish which possessed the sinner's mind when he first stumbled, and fell into the paths of iniquity? But, Oh the mournful sight! E're long you see the same person not only *walking in the counsel of the ungodly*, but also *standing in the way of sinners*, yea, advanced to *sit in the seat of the scornful*. Having once commenced an adept in sin, you hear him boasting of his proficiency in the ways of vice; you see him a mocker of God, of his people, and ways:—defiled and defiling:

defiling:—You behold him erecting Satan's standard at noon-day, enlisting volunteers for the devil, yea, trapanning them into his accursed servitude; 'till at length he becomes as conspicuous in vice as Saul was among the people. He who at first dreaded the slightest deviation from the path of duty, now feels neither shame nor compunction for all the complicated scenes of wickedness into which he is plunged. Thus, through the deceitfulness of sin, he passes on from one act and degree of iniquity to another, 'till at length the sinner becomes hardened in his wickedness. His mind, long accustomed to do evil, grows old in vice; and he arrives at last to the lamentable pitch of taking delight in iniquity, to commit sin with greediness, and to drink up iniquity as the ox drinketh up water; yea, he sells himself to do wickedness, and is led captive by Satan at his will.

5. THAT sin hardens is farther apparent from its never-failing effect, which is to grieve God's Holy Spirit, and in proportion to his ceasing to strive, the heart is hardened apace.

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THEY are far gone indeed who are entirely bereft of all checks and challenges from this monitor. Impenitency of heart and searedness of conscience inevitably take place where the spirit of God ceaseth to strive, and is provoked to withdraw. This appears to have been awfully verified in the instances of *Pharaoh*, of the *Israelites* in the wilderness, and many of those who crucified Christ, and who stoned *Stephen*. Awful is the case of those whom God gives up to their own heart's lusts, and to walk in their own counsels! Their hearts become as firm as a stone; as hard as a piece of the nether-milstone. They are given over, in the just judgment of God, to a reprobate mind; fit fuel to be consumed in the fire of his anger. Know therefore, and see that it is an evil thing and bitter to forsake the Lord thy God. Attend to the solemn admonition given by the Holy Ghost, *To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness, when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, they do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways: so I swear in my wrath, they shall not enter into my*

my rest. Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God: but exhort one another daily while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin *.—But this brings me,

III. To urge an attention to the means of prevention proposed by the Apostle;—*but exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day.*

BROTHERLY exhortation or reproof, in the spirit of meekness, is a commanded duty, highly beneficial, yet much neglected. We are too ready to pray, or to suppose with Cain, *Am I my brother's keeper?* But where the spirit of brotherly and christian love prevails in the heart, there will be an attention paid to the direction given us, *Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him* †.

As motives to stimulate Fellow-Christians to be exhorting one another daily, let it be considered,

* Heb. iii. 7—13.

† Levit. xix. 17.

THAT those who are put among the children, stand in the same relation to God as their Father;—to all the Church as of the same family;—that they have all one righteousness for justification, one spirit for their sanctification, one system of truth, one fund of merit, one fountain to which they daily resort, one employment in time, one heaven through eternity.

AND shall not this thought excite a tender concern in those who are fellow travellers in the road to heaven, to strengthen one another's hands and hearts, and by seasonable exhortation or admonition to further their safe and comfortable passage through the wilderness?

ANGELS would gladly have performed this office, but the Lord has conferred the honour upon you, Christians, to administer seasonable counsel, admonition, or consolation to one another, that ye might thus become helpers of one another's faith and joy, and that thus, by your mutual endeavours to relieve, a sense of obligation might excite to mutual love and gratitude.

—THINK

— THINK also of the inestimable value of a precious soul; the price it was rated at by him who best knew its worth; who accounted his infinitely precious life not too costly a ransom to redeem it.

DID he shed his blood, and shall we withhold a word of caution, exhortation, or consolation from a brother, which costs so little, and may be administered at so small a risk?

— CONSIDER farther, the promises made to those who win souls. *He that doth so is wise; and they that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever* *. And to keep those in the right way who have entered on the path, is not a less pleasing sacrifice to God. If a cup of cold water given to a disciple shall in no wise lose its reward, how much more to pour out a cup of consolation;—of salutary admonition;—of seasonable reproof, or honest exhortation, if we perceive our brother's footsteps to stumble, or in danger of being turned aside from the way of God's commandments?

* Dan. xii. 3.

—THINK of how much service one word has sometimes proved when spoken in season, and the divine blessing hath attended it. How many are there now in heaven who first turned their faces thither in consequence of a seasonable admonition—who have found a word spoken in love penetrate as an arrow of conviction to their hearts; when in darkness it has imparted light to them; when their hearts have been cold, it has enlivened them; when near the precipice of destruction, they have by this means been gently drawn back, and brought into the road to safety and to happiness.

A word thus spoken in due season, how good is it!

AND how happy they who have embraced the proper opportunity, and have not neglected this office of kindness till the season be lost!

IMPROVEMENT.

1. IF sin be so deceitful and hardening in its nature and effects, what an evil and dangerous thing it must be to sin against the
Lord!

Lord! Sin is as a whirlpool or awful gulf that has swallow'd up thousands. Every sin committed draws the sinner and leads him on, till it drown him in perdition.

THEY that make but a distant approach to this whirlpool, or appear but faintly to listen to the tempter, are in the utmost hazard: truly it may be said that many dead are there. How important then is the wise man's caution and exhortation, *Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it: turn from it, and pass away* *.

2. WE infer, that in order to be kept from the fatal influence of sin, it is necessary to call in divine help,

If sin is as the quick-sands to destroy, or as the miry clay, so that none can pull out his feet when once entangled therein, but must sink deeper and deeper to his eternal perdition, how necessary is it for us to look to the hand divine which alone can deliver! Unless the Lord himself keep the soul, none else can be a sufficient shield against this deceiver and destroyer of the souls of men.

* Prov. iv. 14, 15.

CONSCIOUS of our own weakness and inability, the depravity of our natures, and the deplorable wickedness and deceit of our hearts, let us then have our eyes up unto him, who alone can keep us from falling; or when fallen, who only can restore us again. Begging of him that he would change, soften, and purify our hearts by his Almighty Power, and pardon our manifold sins, thro' the riches of his grace, and the redemption of his dear Son our Saviour; and that he would be pleased to strengthen us by his spirit to overcome our sinful inclinations, and strong temptations, and finally receive us to himself beyond the reach of all our enemies.

To conclude. As a Minister of God, and your Brother and Servant, I would earnestly exhort you to flee from sin as your greatest enemy—to present your whole selves as a living and acceptable sacrifice unto God:—to avoid every appearance of evil:—to exhort one another daily; and to be looking by faith to the Lord Jesus that you may be saved from the guilt, and prevalence of sin.

S E R.

S E R M O N IX.

REVELATIONS III. 19.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.

THESE are the words of Christ, to the Church of Laodicea. In the preceding verses he reproves them sharply for their luke-warmness and want of zeal, and threatens them with heavy judgments, if they did not repent. But lest all hope and courage should be thereby banished from their hearts, he in the text, gives them a positive declaration of his love, and assures them that though he reprove and threaten them, they ought not on that account to doubt of his good-will towards them; but on the contrary they ought to take this reproof as a mark of his tenderness, because he uses it
towards

towards those for whom he has a particular affection. *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.* Here is a beautiful declaration that instructs us in one of the most particular secrets of providence, and in one of the most important mysteries of divine love. In discoursing to you from the words I shall enquire

I. WHO they are that Christ loves.

II. How he acts in regard to them: *as many as I love I rebuke and chasten.*

AND then conclude with some Inferences and Remarks.

I. Enquire who they are that Christ loves.

CHRIST JESUS is the eternal word, by whom all things were created, and without him was not any thing made that was made. He gave being to the human race. Life and all the blessings of it flow from him. These may be considered as emanations of his goodness, as streams from the eternal source of love. But he has shewed his love
to

to men in a more wonderful manner, by taking upon himself the office of Mediator, and offering up himself upon the Cross for them, as a sacrifice of a sweet smelling savour unto God. Now by the sound of the Gospel he calls all men to come, and lay hold of his covenant, and invites them to be reconciled to God. Angels were not dealt with thus. When they fell, no Saviour was provided for them. Christ took not on them the nature of Angels but the seed of Abraham; and they are reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, to the judgment of the great day. But though Christ invites all the ends of the earth to look unto him and be saved, the blessings of his gospel are not conveyed to all, because many reject the counsel of God against themselves, and say, *We will not have this man to reign over us.* Persons of this disposition and character are not beloved by Jesus Christ.

THOSE whom Christ loves, are persons that God has chosen in him, before the foundation of the world, that they should be holy and without blame before him in love. He hath called them with an holy calling,
out

out of darkness into God's marvellous light, and is made of God unto them, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Many of them before their conversion were living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. Some were defiled with the most heinous crimes, that the depraved heart of man can contrive, and his hand perpetrate. But now they are washed, they are sanctified. They are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God: and the grace of the gospel teaches them, and enables them to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world. They are crucified with Christ, nevertheless they live; yet not they, but Christ lives in them: and the life which they live in the flesh, they live by the faith of the Son of God who loved them, and gave himself for them. They account themselves no longer their own, but Christ's, being bought with a price, and they glorify him in their body, and in their spirit which are his. Such is the description which the word of God gives us of the persons whom Christ loves. This is their habitual temper and conduct. But the

the most dutiful child may some times by acts of disobedience offend his affectionate father. This is too often the case with the disciples of Christ. We have a melancholy example of it in the passage from which the text is taken. The Laodiceans had lost their first love; their zeal was become languid, they were grown luke-warm and indifferent to the things of God. Tho' the Redeemer is greatly displeased with such conduct, he does not take away his love from them, he retains it still in all its fervour, and manifests it in a way that though painful, is highly advantageous to them. *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten*, and this leads me to the

II. GENERAL head. To enquire how Christ acts towards those whom he loves.

If God took counsel with flesh and blood, with the reason and spirit of man, he would not act in the manner he does. *Why*, say they, *should those whom God loves be thus pained? Why called upon so often to eat the bread of affliction, and to drink the water of affliction? What difference is there between the effects of his hatred and his love.* What! Is there

there no difference between the judge punishing the criminal in order to destroy him, and the father with a heart full of love correcting his child in order to reform and amend him. The word here translated, *Chasten*, comes from that of an infant; and signifies, *to treat as a child*. A father is set before our eyes coming to a child, who has offended him by acting amiss. He begins with reproof. If that answers the purpose, and brings the child to a confession of his fault, and to repent of it, he proceeds no further in severity; for he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men. But if strokes be necessary for their amendment, he lays them on, but not more than is proper for effecting the purposes of his love. The dispositions of his children are very different, some require much correction, others little. According to their different dispositions he deals with them. A look from him is sufficient to make Peter sensible of his sin, and to melt his heart into unfeigned repentance. A simple representation of the case, under the form of a parable, made David sensible of all the heinousness of his sin, and humbled his soul before

fore the Lord. But a dreadful storm, and imprisonment in the belly of the whale, are necessary to bend the stubborn heart of Jonah, and bring him into subjection to the will of God. Extreme poverty, disgrace, a contemptible employment, and all the pain of hunger and want must be combined and used to bring the prodigal to himself, and inspire him with the thoughts of returning to his father's house. In all these ways of God, there is love to men, and where the correction is most severe, it is a proof of not the smaller degree of love. But I proceed to mention some of the most common ways in which God chastens his children.

1. GOD sometimes visits his people with personal and family afflictions. The loss of dear relations and friends is one of these, and a painful affliction it is. This trial fell with all its weight of old upon God's servant Job: and he had none to comfort him. And thus does God often afflict his children now, that he may prove them, and may shew to the world what they are, and that patience may have its perfect work, and their faith being tried in the fire may be found unto praise and honour and glory.

MANY

MANY gracious persons are placed in the lowest situations, and are obliged to contend with pinching poverty. Want stares them in the face from day to day, and they find it exceedingly difficult to provide a bare subsistence for the body.

SOME dear to God enjoy great prosperity for a season. The world smiles upon them: their cup runneth over. At such a time they are ready to say, *My mountain standeth strong, and I shall never see want.* When lo! the tide of prosperity turned, and a low ebb of adversity succeeded. Nor is this humbling change the effect of their folly, or imprudence, or extravagance, or sinful wasting of what the bounty of God bestowed; but it was the doing of the Lord who raises up one, and pulls down another. The world began to rival God in their affections, and therefore the idol of jealousy is broken to pieces. The design of God is to wean them from the world, and to teach them the song of Habakkuk in chap. iii. 17, 18. *Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat,*

meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. He, as it were, addresses himself to the disconsolate soul in these words: How often didst thou profess thy supreme affection to me, and that I was better in thine eyes than a thousand worlds, and that my favour was thy life. Now it is put to the trial. Shew thy sincerity by taking me for thy all. How often have I heard thy voice in the morning, saying, 'I take thee for my God and my all. Give me of the things of earth what thou pleasest. Take from me what comforts of life thou seekest proper. I resign them at thy call; only let the light of thy countenance shine upon me.' I have dealt with thee only according to thy heart's desire. Live on me, thy soul shall find happiness in me.

OTHERS have a delicate frame of body, a weak constitution, and have from their earlier years groaned under a great variety of complaints. They know little of the enjoyments that spring from health, and have most of their days imbittered by pain. It is the design of God that while the outward

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man

man perisheth, the inward may be renewed from day to day, while they look not at the things which are seen, that are temporal, but at the things that are not seen, which are spiritual and eternal.

2. I MIGHT mention all the Judgments that God inflicts on a sinful world, as instruments with which he chastises his people; for in them they share along with others. When war spreads confusion and destruction all around, when famine and pestilence make a land desolate, all are sufferers, and Christians are involved in the common calamity. Many whom the Lord loves, have been chastened by him in this way. But not to insist on this particularly, allow me to observe

3. THAT God frequently visits his people with secret rebukes. The world sees no cause of uneasiness that they have; but their wound runneth sore in the night, and their hearts are full of bitterness. The souls of men are at all times open to God. He can fortify and encourage them, or throw them into dissatisfaction and discontent, and this without

without any external change of circumstances taking place. All created enjoyments are just what God is pleased to make them to us. They are comforts, or they are burdens, just as it seemeth good in his sight. A person shall have the convenience and accommodations of life, but he cannot relish them; they prove to him sapless and insipid: the palate of the mind has lost its power of tasting the sweetness that is in them. Men may be the legal owners of many of the gifts of providence, they may possess them, and call them their own, and yet enjoy no contentment or satisfaction from them. That God who, to preserve his faithful servants from harm, stopped the mouths of the hungry lions in their den, and hindered the fire of the seven-times heated furnace from even singeing the hair or clothes of those that were cast into it; does in order to chasten his servants, when they offend, withhold the virtues from the sweetest blessings in human life, and makes them instruments of severe correction. Many souls that are beloved of heaven does God chastise in this manner on account of their iniquities. But again,

4. GOD sometimes chastens those he loves, with anguish of soul and distress of conscience. This is particularly the case when they have sinned against him. In this way did he correct David of old on account of his heinous sin, as you will see by reading with attention the fifty-first Psalm. God with-holds the light of the countenance: conscience brings past iniquities to mind: a dread of the divine displeasure fills the soul. All joy and peace are banished, and the bitterest anguish oppresses the heart: when God thus sends down one drop of his wrath into the soul, unspeakable misery is the certain consequence. All the other rods that God uses to correct his children are light in comparison of this. God may have various reasons for correcting those he loves in this way. Sometimes it is to chasten them for sins they have committed; at other times to prevent them from committing sin; often, perhaps, to hide pride from their eyes, and to make them sensible of their constant dependence upon God, for peace of conscience, as well as for external blessings. Though we may not be able in every instance to assign the cause, one thing is certain, that we find God
fre-

frequently correcting his children with this rod. By way of example, I shall mention the case of a pious soul, recorded in the 89th Psalm. He thus speaks, ver. 3. *My soul is full of troubles.* Ver. 7. *Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves.* Ver. 14, 15, 16. *Lord, why casteth thou off my soul? Why hidest thou thy face from me? I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer thy terrors I am distracted. Thy fierce wrath goeth over me, thy terrors have cut me off.*

THESE are some of the chastisements which God's love to his people influences him to inflict upon them. To prove that he chastens from love, to them his own declaration is fully sufficient, and his dealings with his people confirm it still more strongly. None of you doubt, but that God loved those excellent men his saints, whose lives are recorded in holy writ. All of them had afflictions and trials. These came from God their Father; therefore, they must proceed from love as their source.

WHEN we consider likewise the happy effects which afflictions are intended to produce,

duce, and the peaceable fruits of righteousness which they actually do produce in them, that are properly exercised thereby, we are still more strongly authorized to say, that the afflictions of his people flow from his paternal affection and regard.

I SHALL conclude the discourse with some Inferences and Remarks.

1. JUSTLY may we be amazed to hear of God's love to any of the human race. When we hear him say, *As many as I love*, we might be led to suppose, that he speaks of Angels and the pure spirits around his throne. But to us men does he address himself, and his love to us is infinitely great. *God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son into it, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life.* Had we heard it reported, *God so abhors the world that he is going to send his Son to destroy men on account of their iniquities*: must have acknowledged, that it would be righteous in God thus to render tribulation to his adversaries. But instead of coming to destroy, Christ is come to save his people from their

their sins, and to purchase for them everlasting glory. O how should this love affect us! It is ignorance and conceit of their own righteousness that hinders men from being sensible of the value of God's love to us. Did we see ourselves in the glass of God's holy law, God's love would fill us with astonishment. If the eyes of our understanding be enlightened, redeeming love will be a frequent theme of admiration and praise. Should we thro' the infinite mercy of God reach the heavenly world, God's love in Christ will be our sweetest song; and eternity will be but just sufficient to celebrate the love of him that sitteth upon the throne, and of the lamb.

2. THIS doctrine presents to us a true glass wherein to behold the divine dispensations. To the natural eye the manner of God's dealing with his children, may at times appear unkind and severe. But there is in reality no such thing. *All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth to them that keep his covenant and his testimonies, (Ps. xxv. 10.) Though clouds and darkness may be round about him, justice and judgment are the habitation*

tation of his throne ; and mercy and truth go continually before his face. His covenant is orderd in all things and sure, well ordered for the benefit of all who are within the bond of it. If the child of God be in heaviness thro' manifold temptations, be assured, there is a needs-be for it. And when he corrects, it is in faithfulness and love. On this account affliction is spoken of as one of the promises of the covenant, in Pf. lxxxix. 30—34. *If my children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments ; if they break my statutes and keep not my commandments, then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my loving kindness will I not utterly take from them, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my mouth.* From these words we plainly infer, that the afflictions of the people of God flow from his loving kindness, and from his faithfulness to his covenant. By afflictions does he free them from many evils, and lead them to the possession of many blessings. The fine gold is purified in the furnace ; the iron is made pliable by fire, and fashioned in the shape required ; the diamond is polished by the wheel ;

wheel; the corn is separated from the chaff by threshing, and the wine is squeezed from the grapes by the weight of the press. In like manner the children of God are refined from the dross of corrupt affections by means of affliction; and are thereby made partakers of God's holiness. Wherever these ends are attained, the person has the best reason to say, *It is good for me that I have been afflicted.*

SOME person might perhaps form an objection to the mode of God's proceedings, and say, *Could not his grace alone without the aid of afflictions make Christians meet for heaven? As none can resist its power, could not the energy of it conquer the rebellion of nature, and keep us in a state of subjection without these painful stripes.* This is just the same thing as to say: *Could not God make corn to be produced in harvest, without seed sown in the spring.* He could with infinite ease. He did so in the beginning. The first corn was produced without seed. But new corn is produced from seed according to a certain established method in providence. In like manner, there is a certain method established by God in the spiritual

tual world, according to which he proceeds. Afflictions are appointed by him as means of sanctification, and though he could effect the same purpose, solely by the power of his grace without afflictions, this would be like producing corn without seed, and needless departure from the laws he has established. And who can expect, God to work miracles, when ordinary means will produce the same effect. And how beneficial are afflictions, when such happy effects are produced by them ! They are the rod that strikes our stony hearts, and makes the waters of repentance to flow ; the cords that bind the heart of the believer to the horns of God's altar ; the discipline that reduces him to order, and brings him under the yoke, the wormwood that thrown into the cup of life, weans the heart from all sublunary things. When men enjoy the smiles of the world, and every thing succeeds to their wish, they are ready to say with Peter on a very different occasion, *Lord, it is good for us to be here.* But when they groan under the yoke of affliction, they are willing to quit the joyless abode, and say with Paul, *I desire to depart, and to be with Christ which is far better.*

4. THIS

4. THIS doctrine should regulate our sentiments with regard to the sufferings of others.

Too apt have many been to judge harshly of their fellow creatures, because of the sufferings they have seen them endure. They have ascribed their sufferings to the want of Christianity, and to the curse of God. This is the judgment that men have frequently passed on those that they hated, and whom they supposed on that account to be hated by God. If any remarkable calamity has befallen a man, they have instantly concluded that he has been guilty of some very heinous sins. This was the way in which Job's friends argued God had afflicted him in an uncommon degree: they therefore insisted, that he must by some remarkable acts of impiety have provoked God to treat him with such severity. The barbarous inhabitants of the island of Melita reasoned in the same manner. When they saw the viper which came out of the heat, fasten on Paul's hand, and hang there for a season, they immediately said among themselves, *No doubt this man's a murderer, whom though he hath*
escaped

escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. God forbid, that we like too many in every succeeding age should follow their steps, and pass such unwarrantable judgment on the divine conduct. Instead of construing men's sufferings into proofs of their crimes, as we know that whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, we should rather be influenced by charity to suppose them marks of love intended to bring them to repentance for past sins, to prevent iniquities in future, or that their graces may shine forth with additional lustre.

REVOLVE in your mind the history of past ages, and afflictions will be found to be the lot of the best of men. There you will see the righteous Abel fall by the hands of an unnatural brother, Noah on the waves amidst the deluge of waters; Abraham in a tent wandering as a pilgrim in a strange country; Jacob fleeing for his life; Joseph in a prison; Moses in exile; Job sitting on ashes; David pursued by Saul, and hiding himself in dens and caves; Daniel among lions; Lazarus surrounded by dogs which lick his sores; Paul buffeted, scourged and stoned;

stoned; Peter in a dungeon and bound with heavy chains. These examples from among many others that might be adduced, shew that we are not to regard the evils of the world as the portion of the wicked; but on the contrary are certainly to conclude, that afflictions are the lot of the righteous and excellent ones of the earth. One grand design of the Book of Job seems to be, to teach us this important truth. The history begins in this manner: *There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job, and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.* Then follows an account of his heavy and complicated distresses. How ill may some think the preface and history accord, and that when we read of his painful afflictions, it might have been supposed he was some very abandoned man whom God was provoked on account of his great wickedness to treat with such severity. But the spirit of God would hereby teach us, that the most upright are subject to the afflictive dispensations of divine providence. Who then will dare to interpret the distresses of others, as the judgments of God, and insult over them, as David informs

forms us in Pl. xxxi. 11. his enemies did over him: *I was, says he, a reproach among all my enemies, but especially among my neighbours, and a fear to mine acquaintance. I have heard the slander of many.* When the Jews saw the extraordinary sufferings of Jesus Christ, they concluded, that he was stricken of God smitten and afflicted for his own crimes; but he was wounded for our transgressions. Let us guard against the like rash judgment, least we make those to be monsters of wickedness, who are really the members of Jesus Christ.

ONCE more to conclude. The doctrine tends to remove all objections against the equity of divine providence; and shews us why so unequal a distribution of the things of this life does at present take place. This life stands in close connection with a future state, and God's dealings with men now, are to be considered in relation to eternity. The strokes of his rod are intended to cure present evil dispositions, and thereby to free us from future misery. The design of God in chastening his people, is to raise their affections from things on earth to things in heaven,
that

that they may not be condemned with the world, but that when Christ, who is their life, doth appear, they may also appear with him in glory. Therefore when we are afflicted, let us not repine, but meekly kiss the rod, and consider the exhortation, which speaketh unto us as unto children. *My son despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him, for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*

S E R-

S E R M O N X.

2 CORINTHIAN IV. 8.

We are perplexed, but not in despair.

TO be in the situation of the Apostles, as described in this, and the following verses, though, to the eye of sense, a melancholy one, and drawn in the darkest colours, yet it is no peculiar case; for what befel them may be considered as descriptive of what the Christian is, in some measure, at least, to lay his account with, while in this militant state. — *To be in heaviness thro' manifold temptations, for the trial of faith, and through much tribulation to enter into the kingdom of G O D; is what we must expect, and pass through, if we would be followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

IT

IT surely, then, may be no unsuitable theme for our meditation, when so many are groaning under national, family, and personal calamities, to touch at some of the causes of that distress through which modern Christians are in perplexity: and tho' Paul, with the rest of the Apostles, and primitive Christians, differ, in many respects from us, in external circumstances; yet there are many others in which we agree, Christianity being at all times, and in all ages, the same.

WE shall, therefore,

IN the FIRST place point out some of the more common and general *causes* of the Christian's perplexity; — and that, respecting either GOD's dealings in a way of *grace*, or dispensations in the course of *providence*.

WE shall, then, SECONDLY, take occasion to shew, that however *perplexed* the Christian may be on these accounts, yet there is no room for *despair*.

I. 1. THE first cause I shall mention of perplexity to the Christian is, *a sense of past*
Q *guilt.*

guilt. He finds no rest to his soul through a remembrance of sin. The sins of nature and of practice; of youth and riper age; of omission and commission; of ignorance or of presumption. 'Tis no difficult matter to muster a vast variety, together with the aggravations attending them.

THOUGH when conscience is asleep, all is hushed within, yet when once it is awakened and enlightened by the spirit of God, it is as when the voice of thunder arouses and shakes the earth? *The remembrance of sin is grievous, and the burden of it intolerable. The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?*

QUITE opposite to this is the state of the unawakened sinner's mind. In the ignorance and blindness of his mind he promises himself peace, though he walk in the sinful imagination of his heart. He accounts it enthusiasm to feel inward pain and distress by occasion of sin. But is it possible to stop or suspend the exercise of thought? No more is it within the power of him who is brought to see *sin as exceeding sinful*, to prevent

vent those painful feelings and inward smart which it occasions.

AND though Christianity holds forth the most powerful encouragement under the deepest sense of guilt, yet to take the encouragement which it affords, requires an influence, and a power superior to his own. Tho' also many have attained a well-founded animating hope that their sins are forgiven them, yet this hinders not the exercise of that repentance which sin occasions. Tho' *the balm of Gilead* hath been applied to heal the conscience wounded by sin, still new guilt contracted renews the pangs of remorse and sorrow.

THE more of divine light and influence you are favoured with; the more affecting your views of God's holiness, of your own imperfections, of the importance of eternity, of the danger of declension, and of the many who have back-sliden, together with the injury the soul thereby sustains, so much the more easily and forcibly will the evil of sin be discovered, and the smart which it occasions be felt.

BUT, though the Christian may be often perplexed, and distressed through Satan's accusations on this account, yet he has no cause to be in despair.

2. ANOTHER cause of perplexity, is the contrariness in himself to the will and the ways of God, and the fresh discoveries which every day affords him of this opposition. The young Christian, especially, is the more perplexed on this account, being, perhaps, what he but little expected. Having, at his conversion unto God, experienced so powerful a change, and his heart so turned from the love and pursuits of sin, he presumed that its motion would continue heavenwards with little variation;—that all *old things were passed away, and all things become new*; and having *put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*; he fondly flattered himself that his spiritual enemies would become as the Egyptians, concerning whom Moses said to the children of Israel after their deliverance from the house of bondage, *Fear not, for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever* *.

* Exod. xiv. 13.

I KNOW no instance in which serious souls are more apt to be mistaken, and but few which open sources of more affecting sorrow to the children of God, than when they make this unscriptural conclusion against themselves. For, though the Christian is, in conversion, turned from darkness to light, and the old man of sin has received his mortal wound; yet the in-being of sin is not taken away; the *law in the members continues to war against the law of the mind*; and the *old man* which is *crucified with Christ*, meets with a certain, yet endures a lingering, death.

O how perplexing is it to his soul, that, *when he would do good, evil is present with him*!--When *the law of the mind* would serve God, *the law in his members opposes it*;—when he would direct his praise to heaven, and fix his meditations there, they so soon flag, and *turn aside like a deceitful bow*;—when he most wishes to rise above the world, then, perhaps, it boldly intrudes upon his mind;—when laying low at the remembrance of past sins, then iniquities most apt to disturb;—when watching his heart and thoughts

most strictly, then they are most apt to wander and break loose ;—when he would tread God's courts, and be employed in his worship there, then a thousand vanities crowd in upon him ;—when most intent on holy meditation, then the cares and fears about a present evil world rob him of his pleasure and comfort ;—when he would be most zealous for God, then self sets up its counteracting interest.

3. THE people of God are often perplexed through their unskilfulness in the word, and in the application which they make of it to their own cases.

WHEN attempting to examine, to prove, to try themselves, whether they are in the faith, they are much in earnest to obtain satisfaction to their minds, but still they find it difficult to draw this conclusion ; namely, *Am I in Christ, if so, then I am a new creature.*

BUT when they know the truth, then they are prone, as was hinted under the last particular, to expect more than scripture promises,

mises, and they argue in some such manner as this; *If we were new creatures, then we should be more holy; more eminent in zeal; we should be full of faith, devotion, and good works; should be living a heaven upon earth, and abstracted from worldly carking cares; then our affections would be set on things above, instead of going out so much after things on earth; then our souls would be set at a holy liberty, and we should run with more enlargedness of heart in the ways of God's commandments.*

BUT, my brethren, though such degrees of grace, and growth in the divine life, are attainable, and most comfortable when possessed; yet, let it be remembered, that the new creature does not immediately commence a strong man, nor does *strong meat* belong but to such as are of *full age*.

THE new creature must first be found — then born — a babe; and from thence advance to a *young man* and a *father in Christ*.

THE seed of God is first sown in the heart, and gradually springs up through the whole

of the believer's life. We expect not a meridian sun at its first rising. And, in like manner, we are assured, *The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day* *. The warrior is not expert in the art of fighting the first day; nor is a victory to be expected, without laying his account with opposition, and with wounds in the field of battle.

BUT a still more perplexing thought, and as the Christian supposes, on still juster grounds, is excited from the consciousness that he not only falls far short of that holiness, heavenly zeal, and devotedness to God which is his duty, character, and privilege; but that he is not even free from actual transgression.—He is often, it may be, surprized into sin—drawn off his guard—and falls a prey to the tempter,—is overthrown even by those sins against which he hath often prayed, and vowed, and on account of them hath mourned and fasted. He feels pride, for instance, flush his mind with a fond conceit of himself; and tho' he thought it mortified, yet he feels within him indica-

* Prov, iv, 18.

tions of its being yet alive and vigorous. He supposed his passions dead, and his mind superior to the workings of malice or resentment, yet these also frequently make their appearance. Nor does, it may be, covetousness, or an over-weening attachment to the world, appear small cause of perplexity. Now, on account sometimes of one, or of another of those corrupt passions, he is led to question the reality of a work of grace begun in his soul.

4. THE Christian is frequently perplexed through a listless and unsuitable frame of mind for the duties of religion, and especially those of the closet. When he would wish to *know where he might find his God, that he might come even to his seat; when he would order his cause before him, and fill his mouth with arguments;* and when he would wish to spread forth all his wants, and to tell unto his God all that he feels and fears; even then he has to complain that his heart wanders unto the ends of the earth. When he would cleave to God in the promises, and, by a lively faith, lay fast hold of him in the different characters he sustains, then
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he feels, as much as ever, cold, lifeless formality, and his heart out of frame for every heavenly exercise. He complains with Job, *Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him;* or like Paul, he cries for the removal of this *thorn in the flesh, this messenger of Satan which buffets him;* and prays, with David, that God would *send out his light and his truth, to lead him to the altar of God with exceeding joy;* and that the benign beams of his reconciled countenance might again be lifted up upon him.

THROUGH the prevalence of such a Laodicean temper as the Christian often feels within him, his mind is perplexed, though not in despair.

5. ANOTHER cause of distressing perplexity, is, when he suffers, or indulges, the apprehension that all his past experience is but delusion; that he has been imposing a cheat upon himself; that he has been calling himself a Christian, whilst, all the time, he supposes that there has been nothing in the frame or exercises of his mind above the ordinary attainments of unsound professors.

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HE reflects within himself, that he may have been a partaker of the sacramental bread, and yet fail of the bread of life; and that he hath been calling Christ *Lord, Lord*, whilst he hath no part nor interest in the blessings of his salvation.

I BELIEVE but few who are now at the right hand of God, but have had their minds thus at times painfully exercised.

BUT though there may be much counterfeit money in the land, still this is no objection against, nor does it diminish the value of the true coin. *He that believeth, saith the Apostle, hath the witness in himself; and when the believer hath his heart sealed by the spirit bearing witness with his spirit that he is born of God; this puts the matter beyond a doubt.*

BUT whilst these perplexing suggestions recur, their tendency should be to excite the soul to greater earnestness—to search the infallible word, and to learn hence both the attainments of hypocrites, and the marks of the true Christian;—to be well acquainted
with

with the balances of the sanctuary, and the different weights by which the standard of a Christian may be really ascertained.

II. WE proposed to point out the *causes* of the Christian's perplexity, not only respecting God's dealings in a way of grace, but also by reason of his providential dispensations. And here we notice

1. THAT bodily pain and affliction may cause perplexing thoughts to arise in the mind. When the body is bound with those fetters of infirmities and diseases which baffle the attempts of medicine to unloose, though the Christian may wish to feel a resigned spirit, yet when, with Job, he has been long in the school of affliction, and no near prospect opens to release, wayward nature wearies, and frets under the load. Add to this, that the trial, in itself great is heightened by the gloomy light in which all, even spiritual things are viewed through the flagging of animal nature. Yea, however unreasonable and unscriptural, yet it is not uncommon, for the afflicted Christian, under the power of temptation, to say, *If I be a child*

child of God, or reconciled to him, I should not be thus punished. In such a disconsolate and uncomfortable state of mind, the soul finds it difficult to attain any comfortable evidence of its gracious state, nor less to keep it when acquired.

HENCE, we account, in one respect, for that distress and perplexity which invades the Christian's mind as to his state;—namely, the force and depression of bodily affliction, particularly when severe, or long continued.

2. He is often much perplexed through frowning providences, in the prosecution of his lawful calling in *life*.

THE race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. Though diligence, industry, and prudence, are necessary qualifications in the affairs of common life, and often, by the blessing of providence, lead to worldly success, prosperity, and affluence; yet how frequently do all lawful exertions and endeavours prove unsuccessful. — The Christian's way appears to be hedged up on
every

every side, and he knows not what path to take, or how to be extricated from his difficulties.

A STRONG tide of adverse occurrences baffles all his efforts. A thick cloud eclipses the sun of prosperity. He calls in the aid of prudence and experience, in dependence on the divine blessing, and yet disappointment thwarts his best-laid plans and best-formed prospects. The fruit of his labour, on which his subsistence depends, is cut off; and even the fruit of his former toil may *take to itself wings and flee away*, and he may be reduced from comfortable circumstances to a piece of bread, and a state of pinching poverty.

Now, when such frowning providences fall to the Christian's lot, and the wave of trouble rolls across his wearied breast, he is sore perplexed, yet not left in despair; cast down, yet not destroyed.

3. ANOTHER cause of perplexity and distress is sometimes occasioned by the misconduct of near and dear relatives.

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WHEN those who are bound to the Christian by the tie of nature and affection, those especially who are dear parts of themselves, act an unbecoming, disgraceful, or sinful part, Oh, what a source of sore perplexity or distress is this to the Christian parent, or tender relative! Ye who have been brought into such a trial as this, only can tell how acute the feelings are which accompany it.

SUCH as have had children born and brought up for God; who have early trained them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord; who have enforced their pious instructions by their holy examples, and have presented them in their humble addresses before the Lord; yet, many such Christians have had their children's misconduct, and yielding to sinful propensities, for a bitter ingredient in their cup of sorrow. Many, from the wayward temper and conduct which their children discover, feel painful apprehensions in the prospect of their future life; and, when these fears have been realized, they have had their *gray hairs brought down, like Jacob's, with sorrow to to the grave.*

ALTHOUGH

ALTHOUGH it affords support and consolation to the Christian Parent when conscience bears witness to the faithful discharge of the trust committed to him; yet what heart can be so callous as not to feel for the shame and disgrace which a child's ill conduct sometimes brings along with it, but above all for the consequences of eternal misery which it entails? O how many of God's dear people, at this hour, feel sore aching hearts on this account, and are mourning over some living and wicked child, more than any can grieve for those that are dead!—Like Rachel, weeping over their children, and refusing to be comforted; having melancholy days of disquietude, and sleepless nights, whilst they pore upon the dark side, and scarce admit one ray of life!

4. AT other times the Christian may be perplexed and cast down, by reason of the darts shot from the bow of malice, and which may stick deep and wound his character.

HENCE it hath sometimes happened, that, though a good name is better than precious ointment, *his character may, thro' the efforts*
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of malice, be injured beyond recovery; tho' he may at the same time be capable of making the most solemn appeal to him that searcheth the hearts, of his innocence and integrity. — Or, if his conduct be not blameless, yet the error may be only in judgment; — the sole effect of inattention, rashness, the want of prudence, leaning too much to his own understanding, and neglecting or despising counsel; yet by the censorious part he stands accused of the worst intentions, and the want of conscience; and what is still more cutting to a Christian, in such circumstances, is, that the ways of truth are in hazard of being, or, it may be, have been evil spoken of; on this account.

NEITHER doth he see a prospect of wiping off those aspersions cast upon his character; of recovering credit with, or obtaining that forgiveness from fellow men, which he hopes he has received from his heavenly Father. But I proceed now,

II. To shew that however perplexed the Christian's mind may be, on these, or other accounts, yet there is no room for despair.

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THE *first* reason I assign in proof of this, is, that such trying and perplexing scenes of life, are no evidences of God's displeasure.

YEA, the covenant which God makes with his people, supposes and comprehends such afflictions and fatherly chastisements *. Here, ample provision is made for the pardon of his sins; here are promises of consolation under the greatest trials.

THERE is no situation, however distressing, which the Christian can be placed in, without some of these being afforded to administer to his support. As the word of God is remarkable for its variety, so he, who, Apollos-like, is *mighty in the scriptures*, and skilful in wielding this *sword of the spirit*, may engage himself to the most afflicted Christian to produce either an example, a promise, a precept, an allusion, or a similitude there, on which one in similar circumstances may be encouraged to trust and hope.

* Pf. lxxxix. 30, &c.

WHY then has thy countenance fallen? Why has despair seared thy breast? *Why art thou cast down, O believing soul? And why art thou disquieted within thee?—Hope thou in God, for thou shall yet praise him, who is the health of thy countenance, and thy God.*

2. HOWEVER perplexed, there is no room for the believing soul to be in despair, because, however dark or adverse appearances may be against him, the sun of righteousness is not lost from the firmament of the Church militant or triumphant, any more than the visible sun is from the natural firmament.

It is remarkable that in our most dreary wintery days, when, as Paul experienced during his voyage, *neither sun nor stars in many days appear*, yet the sun is nearer us than at other times, and not more distant from us, when by intervening clouds he is eclipsed from our view; so God may be near at hand to bless his people, even when they are cast into the hottest furnace of affliction, and he appears to hide his face from them so that they are troubled.

As when correction is laid on, the father's affection is not cooled towards his child, yea, his heart may then feel most for it; so *whom our heavenly Father loveth, he chasteneth; and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth* *. 'Tis his love to his people that guides his hand, even when he lays on the rod.

3. No cause for despair, because the Christian's trials, whatever they may be, are among the *all things that work together for his good*.

THOUGH, in themselves, they are bitter medicines, yet, when they have the blessing of God to accompany them, they prove truly salutary in the end. It is remarkable that many diseases in the body natural and politic, as well as soul-maladies, require strong, painful, and most alarming incisions and amputations. When the surgeon begins and prosecutes the salutary course, a spectator, or the patient himself, is ready to cry out, *it will infallibly ruin and destroy instead of affecting a cure*; and yet, who among us

* Heb. xii. 6,

have not seen or heard that the cutting off a limb has saved the whole body from death?

— That a strict and rigorous execution of wholesome laws has saved a state? Why then may not a similar course be necessary in the Lord's dealings towards his people, to conquer that most obstinate root of bitterness, sinful rebellion against God, which, springing up, troubles us?

4. THOUGH afflictions may be *perplex*, they afford no ground to despair, inasmuch as they are sent to try the Christian's patience, and to exercise those winter graces which shine so illustriously, and to the honour of God, especially in the dark day of adversity.

THOUGH it glorifies God when the Christian is humble in prosperity, and bears the cup without any unbecoming temper, and with evenness of spirit, yet, it is chiefly in adversity that he lets his light shine before men, when he rises superior to every trial, and shews his mind to be settled in perfect peace, trusting in the Lord. Then the world is forced to acknowledge that there must be

a reality in religion which thus supports the soul in adversity, when other cordials fail; and that it is a truly blessed situation to have peace within, in the midst of outward trouble.

WHO can tell how far some have been wrought upon by such views and considerations to enquire after, and embrace the ways of God for themselves?

A SEASON of affliction is the time for the Christian particularly to shine. Many names of those who were as *lights in the world*, have been transmitted down with honour, of whom the world had heard little or nothing, had it not been for their afflictions.

If Job had not met with fore trials, his name might have been lost, and the world deprived of so bright an example.

WHEN we think or speak of him, 'tis not his numerous flocks and herds, or abounding affluence and prosperity that we fix on, but his patience under sufferings. How many are justly accounted great men who
never

never appeared such 'till borne down with adversity, and then rising again with renewed lustre! As a great General is only found out by his surmounting danger, by extricating himself from difficulties; and as he knew not his own size 'till measured with others; so with the Christian; 'tis the midnight of affliction that causes his grace to shine, and the season of sharp calamities which purifies the precious metal of grace, rendering it thus more ornamental and valuable.

GOD is now as a refiner of fire; and as all metals are not equally hard, so he sees it expedient to visit some of those vessels which he casts into the furnace of affliction with milder, and others with more scorching heat. Some must have continued affliction heaped upon them before they are properly impressed, and their hearts sufficiently softened; and in proportion to the quantity of dross adhering, so must the furnace be heated. In the end, however, the Christian shall come forth wanting nothing but what was necessary to be removed.

THO' he can have no affecting joy when he goeth forth weeping, even tho' bearing precious seed, yet what a happy soil is that in which the Christian hath left so much precious seed, and moistened it with many a shower of tears! Now the fruits of righteousness which lay long buried under the clods shew themselves, and fully recompense all former toil and trouble. O when these fields are reaped down, and there shall be the shouting of harvest home, how will the once afflicted Christian come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him! How will he be astonished, and what cause will he have to bless God, for the glory he hath caused to redound to his own name, for the profit he hath brought to the Christian's soul, and for all the gracious designs he proposed to accomplish it, in all his past mysterious dealings, and trying dispensations towards him!

5. DESPAIR, under the forest trials, is unreasonable as well as sinful, when it is considered, that in every situation the Christian has a God to go to, and may confide in him. God is the portion and refuge of his people;

people; the Lord Jesus Christ is their hope; the spirit, the promises, the deliverances which God has wrought out for them, all inspire and invite to hope. The cloud of witnesses who have gone before and come out of great tribulation, beckon to those who follow after in the same path, to inspire them with hope. When no help at all is to be had from man, yet the Lord is a very present help to his people in every time of need; when they are at their wits end, and know not what to do, yet in him they have both counsel and might. When the case appeared desperate to the eye of sense, then, we are told, Israel was delivered: so when things proceed from bad to worse, and every effort to be extricated from trials and afflictions appears fruitless, then is the time for God to arise and work. When he seems by his dispensations as if he was going to destroy, then he is just about to save.

THO' he should cast you down low to the ground, and all his waves and his billows should go over you, still say with Job, *tho' he slay me, yet will I trust in him.* And tho' your outward circumstances should never be
reco-

recovered, nor your afflictions wholly removed, yet think of the thousands of mercies which still remain, and of multitudes who may be more severely afflicted than you,

6. THERE is no room to despair, when we remember how soon the night of affliction must terminate. Several watches may be already past. The day, perhaps, breaks, and the darkest hour is spent.

THOUGH every brook in your way should have some addition from your falling tears, yet, take courage, O Christians! he is on his way for your deliverance, and slumbers not, nor sleeps, who is himself your *bright morning star*, and will bring day in his train. Then the shadows shall for ever flee away; then the clouds that now drop down sorrow shall be dispersed, and all the tears that now bedew your cheeks shall be dried up. *The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away*.*

Isa. xxxv. 10.

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WE shall conclude this subject by the following REFLECTIONS, by way of IMPROVEMENT.

WE may see, from what has been said, how uniformly, in every age, men are born to trouble. This is their inheritance as the fruit of sin. None can cut off the entail of sorrow. A holy God has determined, that *though hand join in hand*, against testifying his displeasure to sin and sinners, either in the person of Christ, or the criminals themselves, it cannot avail: sin and trouble cannot be separated.

How wrong an estimation do they form of Christianity in particular, who promise themselves an exemption from affliction. Since our Lord himself assures his own disciples, that in this world they shall have tribulation! We find many a stream of sorrow runs in this vale of tears, and many a shower sprinkled down from the clouds of adversity. Many find wintery weather and miry roads all the way through the journey of life. If Paul and his fellow Christians had this for their lot, to be *troubled, perplexed, persecuted, cast down*, and afflicted; why

why and whence do we entertain such sanguinary hopes of sublunary happiness? Why feed the imagination with future ease and good? I should have the less objection to this, if we were not so fatally disappointed, and our anguish become doubly keen when plunged in affliction instead of meeting with expected prosperity.

WE may reflect that, when the vale of adversity is viewed in connection with the Christian's prospects, there is nothing so frightful as to terrify him from descending into it. The company now before the throne of God, have done so before him, having *come out of great tribulation*, walked thro' the valley : and so may you, Christian, receiving the same supplies, and possess of the same spirit. Seeing then that Christianity affords so glorious a hope beyond this shadowy vale, how unreasonable is it for the afflicted Christian to say, *is his mercy clean gone for ever? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?* What can be more unscriptural than despair? Had not *the sun of righteousness arisen* on our world, then, indeed, there might have been cause for it, but since he hath come *with healing*

healing in his wings, let despair be banished to hell whence it arose. O how carefully should we watch and pray against this evil, and shun those sins which have a tendency to lead to it!

WE may farther remark, that though the most perplexed afflicted Christian has no cause to despair, yet it is no way contrary to his state and character to feel the rod, and even smart under the calamities which God sends. Neither the Apostles, nor Jesus himself, denied human nature its feelings. A stoical insensibility is not that which God expects of the Christian under afflictions, neither is it pleasing to him. When he sends the rod, the end he designs is, that we should feel, in order to be instructed, and corrected by it.

AN earthly Father is justly displeased when a son out-braves and disregards the rod of chastisement which he sees necessary to lay upon him.

WE may also reflect, with what an undaunted spirit Christianity inspires the Believer!

liever! Not all the calamities of life can overwhelm him; not all the mountains of sublunary grief can crush him, when faith is in exercise. On the contrary, he may join with the Apostle and his fellow Christians in saying, *We faint not, for our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal**.

TO CONCLUDE. If such supports and supplies are provided in the scriptures for afflicted souls, then let our pitchers be daily seen drawing water from these wells of salvation. They are not like Jacob's well difficult of access, neither is there any danger of draining them. The scriptures are as a well of consolation springing up unto eternal life. Here is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, succour for the tempted, support for the weak, and comfort for the most perplexed afflicted soul. May we then be found in the daily exercise of faith on

the promises and prospects set before us in the good word of God ; Then shall we ever find something to cheer and refresh our souls while in this *Baca's vale* : then may we say with the Apostle, *We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed, we are perplexed, but not in despair : persecuted, but not forsaken ; cast down, but not destroyed.*

S E R.

S E R M O N XI.

2 P E T E R I. 4.

WHEREBY are given unto us exceeding great and precious Promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature.

EVERY blessing which the Christian enjoys, or hopes to receive, is to be considered as the gift of GOD, and the fruit of the purchased redemption of the LORD JESUS CHRIST. The proper enjoyment of those blessings, is therefore intimately connected with *the knowledge of GOD, and of JESUS our Lord*, whose power and grace, as manifested on the sinner's behalf, lay the foundation to expect every thing which can conduce either to our present peace and comfort, or to our everlasting happiness.

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But to set the matter beyond a doubt, and to remove those suspicions which unbelief is so apt to excite in the mind, as to the exertions of God's power, and the manifestation of his goodness and love in bestowing undeserved favours upon guilty man, the Lord hath been graciously pleased to pledge his own faithful word of promises; yea, to superadd the security of his oath. The objects of the promises are present benefits and future blessings: the former are referred to in my text where the Apostle says, *that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature*. An expression which ensures to the children of GOD all that they can want to make them happy in time, as well as the eternal fruition of GOD in glory.

FROM this portion of sacred writ, we shall take occasion,

I. To make some observations on the Promises in general.

II. SHEW in what sense the Promises of GOD are said to be *given unto us*.

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III. IN

III. IN what respects the heirs of the Promises are *partakers of the divine nature*. And

IV. To point out the *necessity* of a participation of the divine nature, in order to glorify GOD on earth, or to enjoy him in heaven.

I. WE are to make some observations on the Promises.

WE observe, in general, that the Promises, which GOD is pleased to give, have always respect to some future good, which become the only foundation of hope to sinful man; being, on his part, utterly undeserved, and to which no claim could ever be made by him.

WE shall, then, a little more particularly review, and enlarge on this definition.

THE Promises have for their object all that good which the Lord sees fit to bestow upon his people, either in this world, or in that which is to come. It would be difficult to point out a condition, ever so forlorn, wretched,

wretched, or miserable, to which no Promise in the word of God was suited.

IF the sinner's conscience is awakened, and his soul oppressed with a sense of guilt, and the fear of punishment; if his wounded spirit suffer him to have no rest within, yet what a cluster of exceeding great, precious, and encouraging Promises are here exhibited, to banish his distressing fears, and to speak peace to his troubled breast? If the thoughts of divine justice; if the consideration of God's infinite hatred against sin alarm and affright, yet does not the word of God promise and assure every self-condemned sinner that *the Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy; and that there is forgiveness with him that he may be feared?*

IF brought to a sense of your utter unworthiness of the least of God's favours; or, if apprehensive your sins are too heinous and aggravated to be forgiven, yet do not God's Promises assure you that there is *redemption in the blood of Jesus* for the chief of sinners, believing in him, and that *though*

your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, and though red like crimson, they shall be as wool?

THE monuments of mercy recorded in scripture, strengthen the assurance that he is *faithful that hath promised.*

O WHAT a glorious sight! could we discern those who have fled for refuge to the hope set before them—fled as doves to their windows, and have built in the branch of the tree of life—what a view to behold them clinging to the Promises, and receiving from the accomplishment of them every thing which GOD has pledged his faithfulness to bestow!

By attending to the word of GOD we may observe, that the grand and essential Promises recorded there, are, of the Incarnation of the Son, under the Old Testament, and the gift of the holy SPIRIT of GOD under the New; and with these are implied all others which Believers can stand in need of either for time or eternity. Thus it hath seemed meet to infinite wisdom to grant to
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the world early intimations of the unspeakably rich benefits with which he intended to bless sinful men, and that for the best and most valuable purposes. Such a revelation of mercy, and of *good things to come*, seemed the only, and the effectual method of reviving the spirits of guilty men; for since the fall, if there is any light remaining in the understanding, it serves only to fill it with dread, and the remembrance of offended Majesty, and the hearing of messages from him, are calculated to bring terror along with them, and an apprehension that it is to bring sin to remembrance. Therefore he that knows our frame saw the necessity of combating this principle within—of enlarging our views of himself, and filling them with a deep conviction of his true character. To this end the Promises seem admirably adapted, and to have answered their design in every age, investing the thoughts of sinners with the persuasion that *God is love*.

WITHOUT these assurances, Adam had been plunged in despair; without these, darkness and terror had spread abroad, and there

had only remained the *fearful looking for of wrath to consume GOD's adversaries*. But now, in virtue of these Promises, joy and peace have been shed abroad, and a heaven on earth has been experienced in the believing soul.

HENCE we see, then, that as the Promises of GOD has always some future good for their object, so they become man's only foundation of hope. No encouragement can be derived to the sinner merely from the view of GOD's perfect justice. Man's best endeavours, and most vigorous and virtuous efforts find no place here. The first, and the most necessary principle in religion is *Reconciliation, Go thy way, first be reconciled.--Agree with thine adversary quickly,&c.* Before you can expect that a righteous and holy GOD will accept your offerings, or pay regard to what is called a virtuous course of life, see to it that your persons be accepted, and that ye be reconciled to GOD. Make sure, first of all, how you may come before him and obtain favour in his sight.—Secure to yourselves a friend who has interest, and who will obtain for you a favourable

able introduction into the king's presence. Now this can only be had through faith in GOD's anointed Son, and the assurance which his word of Promise affords us, that he will look upon us, and bless us, for a Redeemer's sake.

GOD's giving us Promises — so *exceeding great and precious*, implies, that the blessings contained in them are utterly undeserved by sinful man, and to which no claim could ever be made by him.

THE good things which are promised in the word of GOD are not the reward of merit, nor any debt due to the sinner, but are altogether to be regarded as gratuitous favours conferred upon him. They are, it is true, the procurement of merit, but then it is the merit of another; they are the reward of obedience, but it is the perfect obedience of him in whom all the *Promises are yea and amen, to the glory of God.*

WITH respect to spiritual blessings contained in the Promises, they are to be considered in the design, purchase, and appli-

cation of them, as proceeding from the free, absolute, and unconditional grace of GOD; and are, strictly speaking, parts of that salvation, and the first fruits of that grace, which delivers the believer from sin and misery, and brings him to holiness, happiness, and heaven. If faith, repentance, or any other act of ours, are considered as proper conditions, it is necessary that they should be the sole work of the creature without any divine agency, and without any imperfection; but this is the very reverse of scripture; and indeed, these are as much the subjects of the Promises as any other that could be mentioned, and which are the effects of the free and rich grace of GOD.

IT is to be owned, however, that in the Sinai Covenant which GOD made with the children of Israel, (and to which there is a particular reference in Jer. xxxi. 31, 32, &c.) the conditions of it were undeniably ascertained; because, though in this Covenant there were types of good things to come, and of spiritual blessings, yet, strictly considered, it was a covenant of *temporal* mercies, of worldly prosperity, of national privileges,

vileges, of victory over enemies, &c. and hence the language of GOD to Israel under that Covenant is, *If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land; but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword; for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it **.

BUT the Covenant of grace has another Mediator, and better promises. — It hinges on a condition, — but that condition is fulfilled by him with whom the Covenant is made, and in consequence thereof, all the Promises of it are said to be *in* and *to* him the Mediator and surety of it. The Covenant is thus turned into a Testament, and contains a bundle of exceeding great and precious Promises, which have been in every age, all the salvation and only cordial of the people of GOD. And hence the Promises of eternal life, as they respect us, are as free as the light. The sun which shines, the rain which drops, the dew which descends are not more unconditional, absolute, and independent on man, than the Promises of GOD's grace, or *the times of refreshing which come from the presence of the Lord*.

* Isa. i. 19, 20.

WHO is he who will stand forth and say, *I am interested in the Promises of GOD, because I have entitled myself to them; I have founded a claim, and wrought my way, to the possession of them?*

GOD's Promises are bonds graciously signed, and sealed by the Father to his eternal Son; or, shall I call them bills drawn by the GOD of truth on the treasury of heaven for full value received from the surety of an infinite debt?—These Promises, (may I be allowed the expression?) are endorsed to every believer, as they and He are one in law. Millions of them have been presented for the pardon of sin; and a company, which no man can number, have drawn forth sums from this treasury which no Angel could reckon. The fine gold wherewith they are enriched, comes thro' this channel. Not a prayer or ejaculation goes to heaven from a child of GOD without having some of these enclosed; and tho' the heavens are high above the earth, yet thousands e'er they have arisen from their knees have had a return.

NONE

NONE of those prayers having the spirit's mark ever returned empty, or payment refused at the bank of heaven. Such, indeed, as disparage or neglect the office of the HOLY SPIRIT may have cause to complain; or such as look on the benefits sought after as the reward of duties performed, or in return for obligations conferred.

LET me add, that the faithfulness of God the Promiser engages him to fulfil his Promises. To ensure the payment of them, our Intercessor appears in the midst of the throne to sue out the accomplishment of them; and *him the Father heareth always.*

ALL the Promises are answered in the happy experience of the servant of God when he arrives at the threshold of heaven. Such can say, with Joshua of old, *Behold, I am going the way of all the earth; and ye know in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof*.*

* Joshua xxiii. 14.

BUT

BUT Oh! if the earnest received while on earth filled the heart of the dying faint, how will the full possession of the inheritance and blessings promised delight his soul? If the first fruits are so sweet, what will be the ripe clusters of these grapes of Ephcol? If the dawn is so bright, what will be the splendor of noon day? If it is good to be here, whilst only at the threshold, how great the happiness when the believer shall enter the gates, and dwell in the city of the New Jerusalem? — Well may the believer exult and triumph, who is interested in these exceeding great and precious Promises!

NEVER despair, O Christian, 'till you hear that the treasury is empty, or the fulness that is in Christ is dried up. But I proceed now

II. To shew in what sense the Promises of GOD are said to be *given unto us*.

1. THE Promises of GOD are given unto us as the purchase of CHRIST. Tho' they are freely given to us, yet not so to him the Mediator.

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HE bought his people, and all spiritual good things for them, with the invaluable price of his own blood. In this *point of view* we may remark, that GOD's *exceeding great and precious Promises* are not so properly free and gratuitous, arising from unmerited love of GOD, as the fruit of the Son's purchase. The Promise of CHRIST the unspeakable gift of God, was indeed, sovereign; but all other Promises flow thro' the channel of CHRIST the Mediator, and are by the obligation of a faithful GOD, granted for value received. — They are not wages due to our obedience, but to that of the surety. They are not conferred on condition of sincerity, or any other virtue qualifying us; but all as the Promises are *in* CHRIST, and made *to* CHRIST, hence they become the property of his spiritual seed. They are his originally and primarily; that is to say, every benefit promised was stipulated to him in the council of peace between him and the Father; all the good things contained in the Promises were the gifts he received for men. All the ingredients of eternal life come to us in this channel. The Promises and all they contain, are in him, and

and by him ; fought in his name : received as his purchase : acknowledged to be of his procuring : it is, therefore, IN HIM that believers are blessed with all spiritual and heavenly blessings. He is their *Alpha and Omega ; their all in all ; made of GOD unto them for Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption.*

HENCE they who, through faith, are interested in CHRIST and the Promises, may abound in hope. To the heir of Promise who has obtained strong consolation, GOD addresses himself, saying, *Son, all that I have is thine.*—And saith the Apostle, *all is yours ; for ye are CHRIST's ; and CHRIST is GOD's.*

NOTHING can be more absurd, then, or improper, than for a believer in CHRIST to question his right to this or the other Promise. *He that spared not his own Son—how shall he not with him also freely give us all things ? And if children, then heirs ; heirs of GOD, and joint heirs with CHRIST.* When married unto CHRIST, you need not fear the bestowment of the richest of presents from him.

2. THE Promises of God are justly said to be given unto us, inasmuch as they come as free and undeserved gifts to us.

THO' they are *exceeding great and precious*, yet are we invited to partake of the blessings contained in them, *without money, and without price*. The first motion of good, and the first operation of the Promises, is from GOD to man, that he will put his Spirit within him, &c. The first ray of heavenly light by which the dark understanding becomes illuminated, is not struck from reason, but comes from the Almighty Creator who first caused the light to shine out of darkness.

WHATEVER may have been affirmed of the freedom of the will, of the first efforts on the side of the creature, and a co-operation of grace, yet, certain it is, that the Promises, with all the blessings wrapped up in them, are *freely given us of God, and that salvation is of him alone*. None will be so earnest to ascribe the whole glory of this salvation to sovereign grace as the Believer, one part of whose garb is humility, with
which

which he is clothed, and all the children of the family of heaven are adorned.

WE proceed now

III. To enquire in what respects the heirs of the Promises are *partakers of the divine nature*.

THIS is an expression truly emphatic and sublime, the import of which cannot be fully comprehended or understood, even by those who have the most striking resemblance unto God.

WE may, however, though in an inadequate manner, conceive the text to imply, that the *nature—progress—and tendency* of the believer's life is divine.

IN one sense a finite creature is incapable of being a *partaker of the divine nature*. The essential perfections of God are incommunicable. He can never have a rival, far less an equal in Omnipotence, Omniscience, Eternity and the like. And though Adam was made in his image, yet he bore
but

but a faint resemblance to his moral perfections. But the new creature formed in CHRIST JESUS, seems more clearly to describe the image of GOD, because he who is the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, is the principal original, pattern, and end of this new life, which the heirs of Promise live. Hence, saith the Apostle, *we all, with open face, beholding as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord.* And he adds, that GOD who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of GOD in the face of JESUS CHRIST*. When regenerated by the SPIRIT of GOD, the soul is said to be created in CHRIST JESUS, and after the image of GOD. *Christ in you,* saith the Apostle, *the hope of glory*†. So that when this new and divine life which the Christian partakes of, arrives to maturity, and he lives agreeable to the principles of this new nature, he dies unto sin, unto

* 2 Cor. iii. 18. & iv. 6. † Ephes. ii. 10. iv. 24.

& Coloss. i. 27.

self, and the world; and it is *not so much* he who lives, as *CHRIST* that liveth in him; and the life which he lives in the flesh he lives by the faith of the *SON of GOD*. He is made like him, while on earth, in righteousness and true holiness: but this likeness at present is but imperfect; the remainders of sin marr it, and prevent a perfect resemblance. But when he, who is the Believer's life, shall appear, we shall be like him, saith the Apostle, for we shall see him as he is *. And the pious Psalmist declares, as for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness †.

Thus the Believer's new and spiritual life is of a divine nature, and of heavenly original.—Saith James, of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures ‡. And the Evangelist John in like manner intimates that the sons of GOD are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, but of GOD§. This divine nature, in the regenerate soul,

* 1 John iii. 2.

† Ps. xvii. 15.

‡ James i. 18.

§ John i. 13.

is the product of *the incorruptible seed which abideth and remaineth for ever*.

THIS new nature is divine also in its *progress*, as it is the work of the SPIRIT of GOD, and that which depends on his blessed agency. No stone is laid in this temple of grace, but by the hand of this divine Architect. — No feature is drawn of the image of GOD on the soul of the new creature, but by his pencil. If Adam was adorned with the beauties of holiness, it is his Almighty hand that pourtrays the whole. If he appears as a Priest, it is the SPIRIT of GOD who pours on, and anoints him with sacred oil. — If arrayed with royal robes, it is he who clothes him. — If invested with a royal spirit, and raised above self; if lifted from earth to heaven in his desires and views, it is by virtue of the SPIRIT of GOD's Almighty hand. If victorious over his spiritual foes, it is his right hand, and holy arm, that giveth him the victory. If the Believer is *rich in faith*, it is from the spirit's *taking of the things of Christ*, and shewing and imparting them unto him. If *meet for the inheritance of the saints of light*, it is he who fashions and pre-

pares him. If dead to self, it was he who enabled him to conquer.—If the Believer is not of this world, it is he who makes him of another. If alive unto GOD, it is CHRIST who is his life. Surely the hand which draws on the soul such lineaments corresponding to the image of GOD must be divine!

But farther:—it may justly be accounted a divine nature which Believer's are partakers of, when we reflect that as this new principle proceeds from GOD, so it leads the soul back to him. Such is its uniform *tendency*. As the waters that return into the ocean, are received into its bosom, and mingle with their original element; or, as the rays darted from the sun are again absorbed, and constitute a part of the elementary fire; so the soul created after GOD's image returns unto GOD, and hath the outlines filled up in a more perfect resemblance to its divine Author.

BUT it must, after all, be confessed, that the sublime scriptural representations given of this high, holy, and divine felicity, far surpass our limited faculties.—When we are
told

told that *He who dwelleth in love, dwelleth in GOD, and GOD in him*; that *CHRIST is the Believer's life*; and that the Believer lives by *CHRIST's living in him*; and that he is *one with CHRIST*; and that this union is indissoluble, even in death,—that neither life nor death shall separate, surely some inconceivable glory is implied in such expressions!

As our nature is a compound of body and soul, and we at present are surrounded by objects of sense; we know but little of our own spirits, and still less of an union of spirits, and especially of that ineffable connection between the infinite and uncreated SPIRIT, and these finite ones.

THAT the soul is capable of advancing to a greater assimilation to the divine likeness, let it be considered, that however eminent in grace the most excellent of the saints of GOD may be; however great their attainments in holiness, yet not so as to exclude all farther progress; and as there are degrees of grace on earth, so there will be degrees of glory in heaven. Thus the hap-

perfection of man's nature consists in being made perfect in bliss ; yet is he *a little lower than the Angels*. A child is perfect, but not in the same sense that a man is who has arrived to the full proportion of manhood. We may well suppose, that the more the soul beholds, through eternal ages, the glory of the LORD, it will be more and more cast into the same image, and arrive to a more full and perfect participation of the divine nature.

WE propose in the

IV. AND last place to point out the necessity of this participation of the divine nature to answer the chief end of man which was *to glorify G O D, and to enjoy him for ever.*

1. IF we attentively consider, we may perceive that infinite wisdom has this great end in view by all the means of his appointment. Ministers are ordained and sent forth; Gospel Churches instituted ; *exceeding great and precious Promises are given us ;* and all, that by means of these we *might be partakers of the divine nature.* And however
remote

remote some of the Old Testament figures and ceremonies might be from that godlike end, yet, if viewed aright, they meet as lines in the center; and though they have no native tendency to promote such an effect, yet all the means ordained of God, and when accompanied by his blessing, became mighty, to accomplish this important purpose. All the means, however costly and valuable, are still in themselves, utterly insufficient; like scaffolding, which having performed the part assigned it, will be set aside when the building is completed. The grand work to be accomplished, is, that *we might be partakers of the divine nature*; — to have a spiritual renovation carried on in the universe, and in the souls of men; the bringing men from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God. If natural men comprehend not this, it is not in the least astonishing. It fills the expanded minds of the angelic host who are engaged in the contemplation of this mystery of grace, this great work of omnipotence.

2. THE necessity of our becoming *partakers of the divine nature* appears, because

without this we are incapable of the enjoyment of GOD. *Can two walk together except they be agreed? What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath CHRIST with Belial?* Can light and darkness blend together? If GOD is light, how can darkness dwell with him? If GOD is love, can he bear with those who are hateful, and hate of him? If GOD is holiness itself, can impiety unite with him? If with pleasure he beholds the upright, must he not also hate all the workers of iniquity? How shall the lip of blasphemy acquire the notes of those before the throne who praise GOD without ceasing, and are singing the song of Moses and the Lamb? What experience could the wicked have of those transports of joy which fill the souls of saints in heaven, while they continue enemies to GOD, and at enmity with him?

GOD is also of purer eyes than to behold iniquity without abhorrence. Was it not the sin of rebellion that expelled the Angels from heaven? Was it not the sin of man that thrust him out of Paradise, and banished him from the presence of his GOD? Was it not

not God's abhorrence of sin that led him to require a satisfaction before its guilt could be expiated, or its punishment removed? The Father's hatred of sin appears in the death of his beloved Son. — The Son's hatred of it, in that he was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, and put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. — The Holy Spirit's hatred of sin, — because it is that which is said to do despite unto, — to grieve, and to quench the spirit of grace. The holy Angels also hated sin, as it acts in opposition to that God whom they serve, and is that accursed thing which his soul hateth. The Church militant and triumphant hated it. Sin is that which caused them all that burden under which they groaned; all the griefs which they carried. This is the fountain head of all those tears which flowed from their eyes. This the sad cause of all the Christian's stumbling; that which, at times, causes no rest in his bones.

With what society, then, could the lover of sin, and the workers of iniquity mingle himself, supposing he were to gain admittance into heaven? The air which the
holy

holy inhabitants of the place breathe would be too pure for him; the songs of Zion would glow with too ardent a flame for his cold heart to be affected with; the language of Canaan, the only one they are acquainted with in the New Jerusalem, would ever be unsuitable for him.

SINCE then, GOD will not lay aside his holiness to conform to the sinner's depraved taste; since neither Saints nor Angels in glory will be transformed into the companions of sin with those who love not GOD; what follows, but that a divine nature is absolutely necessary to fit for heaven's felicity? It would be inconsistent with all the attributes and declarations of GOD to admit into his immediate presence such as are without his likeness, and do not delight in him; or to receive to the full fruition of himself, such as are not transformed into the same image. Evil cannot dwell with him. He only beholds the upright with approbation, and we are expressly assured, that *without holiness no man shall see the LORD.*

COULD it be supposed possible, that he should lay by his indignation, and impose
no

no punishment; yea, that he should allow the opposers of his unspotted holiness to tread the heavenly courts; yet, even in this case, such a state would be intolerable to such as were never *partakers of the divine nature*.—The sight of glorious heavenly objects would be horror to them—the place itself would be their torment; the heavenly exercises would in the highest degree gall them. And therefore, though there were no positive prohibition, yet, in the very nature of things, an unregenerate man must be excluded from the presence of GOD, and the enjoyment of him in heaven.

3. THE necessity of being *partakers of the divine nature*, in order to our enjoyment of GOD, appears, inasmuch as all Christians are predestinated to be conformed unto CHRIST, and there is no holiness without this. The elect of GOD compose one great body of which CHRIST is the head; and without conformity, or, if strangers to him, we can have no part or portion in him; for *if any man be in CHRIST he is a new creature*.

As

As it behoved *CHRIST* the Mediator in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to *GOD*, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people *; and as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same †; that thus the head and the members might become one body;—so, it is evident, that the latter must be conformed to their head, in their measure, in divine qualifications, even as he was to them, in those that were human: they are begotten by the same spirit; belong to the same Father; are his Brethren, *bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh*;—the Promises made to him become their property, as all his are theirs; the glory that should follow is theirs also, since he shares it with them.

THIS serves, then, to shew us the reason why he rejects those nominal professors who are only in him by an outward appearance, and says to such, *I know ye not, whence ye are, depart from me, ye that work iniquity!* They are not of his body; they bear no re-

* Heb. ii. 17.

† Ver. 14.

semblance

semblance to him; and have none of those gracious qualities which describe the Christian character. He knows none in his mediatorial capacity but such as are conformed to him; and this will soon be the grand criterion by which to judge of mankind—*whose image and superscription have they?* Be assured, that neither the number and prevalence of a sect, nor the orthodoxy of their principles, nor the outside appearance of religion will avail, unless the professors of CHRIST be also *the partakers of the divine nature, and renewed in the spirit of their mind.*

4. LET me add, that this is the design of the SPIRIT'S inhabitation to transform the soul into the same image, and to assimilate to the divine likeness. All his convictions, motions, impulses, admonitions, challenges, are in order to this god-like end. He comes to raise the sinful soul from the ruins of the fall. What Satan boasts of as a grand exploit in making the temple of GOD a receptacle of sinful lusts, worse than that of owls, or dragons; when the Holy Spirit comes with his convincing and sanctifying influences, he takes up his residence there, not as
a way-

a way-faring man that tarrieth only for a night, but to abide there till the last breath of the Christian, and then to raise the new creature to the heaven of heavens. The more thoroughly the soul is cast into this mould, the more eminently he shines as a Christian; the more he derives of this Spirit; the more evidence has he of being an adopted son, an heir of God; and a joint heir with CHRIST.

FROM what has been said, we may draw the following INFERENCES as an IMPROVEMENT of the Subject.

1. HAS the LORD given unto us sinful creatures, such exceeding great and precious Promises? O how different are God's thoughts from our thoughts, and his ways from our ways! — Who, instead of executing his most direful, and justly deserved threatenings, and the full vials of his indignation upon us as guilty offenders, sends us the most gracious, rich, and endearing Promises;—speaks to us, in these, with the most sweet and engaging assurances of his love; and pledges his truth, yea, all his perfections,

tions, for the fulfilment of them towards all the sons of GOD, and heirs of glory!

HERE also we see the usual channel thro' which all saving benefits flow towards us; through the Covenant of GOD, and the Promises which he hath given us. The grand Promise of all, the LORD JESUS CHRIST, that *exceeding great and precious Promise* is given as GOD's unspeakable gift to sinful man;—the spirit of grace and holiness is also bestowed as a promised gift. Every grace which the Christian exercises; every gracious quality that he is endowed with, such as Faith, Repentance, Sanctification, and holy Obedience; in short, the whole of eternal life in its purchase and application, are to be regarded as the effect of the free, unconditional, and precious Promises of GOD to the believing sinner.

HENCE we ask, that if these Promises of GOD are so full, free, and explicit; so *exceeding great and precious*; why then that joyless, desponding, or drooping heart so often to be found in the heir of Promise? Why, is he *afflicted, tossed with tempest,*
and

and not comforted? — There is enough in the Promises to supply every want; enough there to banish every fear; enough to enrich the soul throughout all eternity; enough to revive the most drooping, cheer the most disconsolate, and to impart peace, and comfort, and joy, to the greatest mourner in Zion. If thou dost believe, thou shalt see the glory of God, and the accomplishment of his Promises. How disparaging must it be to the God of truth, when we either despise his invitations, or refuse to rely on his gracious assurances! The Apostle speaks of making God a liar through unbelief. And if we can give credit to a fellow creature, and trust his fidelity, how insulting must it be to the LORD our God when we distrust his free and faithful Promises, or reject the comfort of his gracious declarations!

O then, earnestly pray to the LORD that he would strengthen thy faith, and help thine unbelief!

2. Is the design of God in giving us his Promises, *that by these we might be partakers of*

of the divine nature?—How divine and glorious a system is Christianity, how *worthy of all acceptance*, which has for its object the advancement of human nature to such a pitch of perfection and glory!

To have resembled Angels, would have been unspeakable grace, when manifested towards such sinful and ungrateful creatures as we are; but how much greater is the honour conferred, when the LORD of all intends by this revelation of mercy to raise fallen man into a state of union with, and likeness unto his blessed self!

O wonderful grace! Astonishing condescension! What heart could have conceived it if GOD himself had not spoken it!

MAY it be our happiness to believe this truth with application to ourselves; and experimentally to know that this resemblance to GOD is drawn upon our souls now, as an earnest that we shall hereafter *be like him, and see him as he is!*

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WE infer, also, from this branch of our subject, that the weak Christian ought not to despond, though his attainments in religion may be of a low kind, and such as make him often call in question the reality of that change that has passed upon him.— You are encouraged still to look to the freeness of GOD's Promises, and to plead the benefit and fulfillment of them towards you. Though your attainments are comparatively but small, and your likeness to your GOD and SAVIOUR but very imperfect, yet give not up with your confidence and hope, for *who hath despised the day of small things?*

GOD's word intimates unto us, that there are different degrees of grace, and different attainments, in the divine life. There are *babes in Christ*, as well as *young men*, and *fathers*; and his encouragement even to the weakest Believer is, that he *will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, until he shall bring forth judgment unto victory.* — *He which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of JESUS CHRIST**

* Isa, xlii. 3. and Phil. i. 6.

BUT let it be at the same time observed, that though small and imperfect attainments ought not to cause the humble and sincere Christian to despond or give up his hope, yet it much concerns him to seek after a growth in grace, and a greater participation of the divine nature. Oh, at what a distance are the best of us from GOD! How faint is the resemblance to his blessed image! Let us then seek after, and pray for, more of his lovely likeness to be drawn upon our souls; that *the same mind may be in us which was also in CHRIST JESUS*; and that, with holy Paul, we may count not ourselves to have apprehended, but, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, we may press towards the work, for the prize of the high calling of GOD in CHRIST JESUS*.

TO CONCLUDE. If the Promises are so useful and necessary, as a means of raising up our natures to their highest dignity, even a resemblance unto the image of GOD, then how proper and beneficial must it be for us to acquaint ourselves with this com-

* Phil. iii. 13, 14.

fortable part of the word of God!—They were *written for our learning, that we, thro' patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope.* May we then be found reading, and pleading them, meditating upon them, and abundantly experience the blessings contained in them fulfilled to our present benefit, and our everlasting happiness and joy! AMEN.

S E R M O N XII.

I S A I A H L. 10.

*Who is among you that feareth the Lord,
that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that
walketh in darkness, and hath no light?—
Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and
stay upon his God.*

THE fear of the Lord is the beginning
of wisdom. Such a fear, as implies in it
an habitual impression of being under the
eye of an omniscient God, a holy reveren-
tial awe of him, and regard to the divine
attributes; connected with a delight and
joy in the Lord, is the very essence of true
religion. Though *the fear of the Lord* is a
phrase which so often occurs in scripture,

and is a frequent subject of speculation, yet by many it is misapprehended, and an unscriptural sense bestowed upon it.

WE shall, therefore,

I. ENDEAVOUR to give a plain scriptural explanation of the character spoken of in our text.

II. NOTICE the state of mind, which such, it is supposed may be in: *that walketh in darkness, and hath no light.*

III. POINT out the duty to which such is called, *let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay, &c.*

I. THE first part of the character addressed in our text, is that of him *who feareth the Lord.*

THIS blessed principle is distinguishable from, and in many respects opposite to, that dread of Deity, that terror of wrath, which, more or less, accompanies the idea of God in all natural men. The Heathens themselves are not free from the challenges
and

and accusations of conscience, which imply a belief, and a dread of God. Indeed, no sentiment seems to have had a wider spread than this. To this fear and horror, which a guilty conscience occasions, is to be attributed that dread of apparitions, and tremor of mind, from which, at times, the stoutest men have not been exempted. But it is only where this slavish dread ends, that the true filial and obediential fear of God begins: the one originates in the idea of an avenging God who has denounced, and will execute wrath as the enemy of the sinner; the other is excited by, and attended with the feelings of a most ingenuous gratitude, a faith working by love, manifesting itself in a constant, undissembled fear of offending God through the prevalence of sin.

BUT farther; — this fear is not taught by the commandments of men. Parents may give their children a religious education; may restrain them from open vices and regulate their outward manners; but they cannot implant the abiding principle of the genuine fear of God, this is the peculiar gift which is bestowed by God, agreeable to his free and gracious promise, *I*

*will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for ever. — And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me**. — Men may have considerable influence over themselves in curbing or concealing their inclination to outward immoralities; a principle of pride, honour, fear of shame or punishment, the prospect of a good name, or temporal advantage may all combine their force, and serve to lay a restraint upon sinners, but none but God himself can inspire the soul with a true obediential fear of him, for,

LET it be remembered, that this fear of God is the immediate effect of reconciliation with him. In the heart of the natural man, it is hatred, not the fear of God, that predominates; but when the ministry of reconciliation is faithfully executed, and the report of the gospel cordially believed, a wonderful revolution of sentiment takes place; the former principles are overthrown, and other views, thoughts, desires,

* Jer. xxxii. 39, 40.

hopes and fears succeed. When the joyful sound is not only heard, but known and believed, and Christ and salvation by him actually received, then the heart is changed, its enmity to God is slain, and hatred is transformed to love; the stubborn will is bent, and inclined to make the wisest choice; the unsanctified affections are purified, the door of the heart, at which the Redeemer so long knocked, is open to receive him; and, in token of reconciliation, the Lord sups with the believing soul, that is, holds communion with him, speaks peace unto him, and fills him with comfort and joy. These are the blessed concomitants and effects of having the fear of God put in the heart. And moreover,

WHEREVER this principle prevails, it causes the man to entertain an habitual jealousy over himself, and a holy dread lest he should act inconsistent with his religious profession, and by sinful ingratitude to such a friend, for such inestimable favours conferred on him, provoke him to depart and leave him to himself. The reflections of such a soul, influenced by the fear of God, will

will be to this effect: *O what madness was I guilty of when in a state of unregeneracy, vainly and impiously opposing myself to God, my best, my everlasting friend!—When I hated and feared him as an enemy, setting at nought his counsel, being blinded by the God of this world!—Everlasting praises be ascribed unto him who pitied me, who having made up the breach, and reconciled me to himself by the death of his Son, hath slain this enmity, and spoken peace to my soul, by speaking pardon to my soul.—Bless the Lord, O my soul! Let me henceforth praise him not only with my lips, but also with my life: let it be my daily study to walk as becomes a child of God, as becomes one influenced by the love of God shed abroad on my heart.—Oh that the day might never dawn that should be witness to a disloyal thought arising in my breast!—Such will be the reflections, and breathings of those among you who truly fear the Lord.*

2. THE other part of the character addressed in my text, is *obeying the voice of God's servant.*

By

By the Lord's servant here we are doubtless to understand the Lord Jesus Christ, who, in reference to the work of man's redemption, is frequently denoted by this character *.

THOUGH he was a Son, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God, yet *he took on him the form of a servant, and learned obedience by the things which he suffered* †.

Obedying the Lord's servant, (Christ) is with propriety subjoined to the other character of *fearing the Lord*, inasmuch as the latter being an internal principle powerfully operating in the heart, and regulating its movements, so obedience becomes the genuine proof of this fear's being sincere, and of a genuine evangelical kind; a truly gracious affection of heavenly original, evidenced by bringing forth the fruits of holy obedience, since, without this, faith is dead, being alone; and therefore the Apostle adds, that Christ *became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him* ‡; i. e.

* Isa. xlii. 1, 19. Isa. xli. ix. 6. Isa. lii. 13. Isa. liiii. 11.

† Philip ii, 7, and Heb. v. 8. ‡ Heb. v. 9.

the author of salvation to Believers in his name, and who, as a proof thereof, cheerfully obey him.

PRACTICAL Godliness, or Christianity, may be denominated *obedience*, to intimate to us, that Believers in Christ, though freed from the condemnation and curse of the law as a covenant of works, yet are *not without the law of God, but under the law to Christ*;* and that the word of the gospel, when it comes with power and divine efficacy into the heart, *brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*.† Nor is this to be wondered at when we consider with what sovereignty the Lord's servant and anointed is invested, having *all power in heaven and in earth, given unto him, who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God, angels, and authorities, and powers being made subject unto him*.‡ His authority over the Church triumphant as well as militant is solemnly recognized by the eternal Father when he saith, *let all the angels of God worship him* §, which is represented as being

* 1 Cor. ix. 21.

† 2 Cor. x. 5.

‡ Pet. iii. 22.

§ Heb. i. 6.

done

done accordingly *. And how early was the doom of disobedience pronounced on those who hear not, or obey the voice of this Prophet †! The Apostle Paul farther assures us, that *the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel,* &c. ‡

OBEDIENCE to Christ is enjoined as a test of our fearing the Lord, not only as he is Jehovah's servant, but also the Church's Lord and Law-giver. *'Tis to his sceptre, therefore, that the Christian bows, and yields obedience to the law in the hands of a Mediator; as it is by him he is to be judged, and from his lips to have the blessed sentence of absolution pronounced.*

WHEN we reflect on these things we may perceive with what propriety true religion and godliness is accounted obeying the voice of Christ, or the Lord's servant.—In the

II. PLACE, I PROCEED to notice the state

* Rev. v. 11, &c. † Deut. xviii. 15, 19, 20.

‡ 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.

of mind which it is supposed such may be in; *walking in darkness, and having no light.*

THIS appears to be a melancholy state, in so much that some have been led to account it incompatible with a state of grace; yet it is to be noticed, that it is immediately connected with the preceding character, which intimates to us, that sometimes at least, the very same person who feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant, also *walks in darkness, and hath no light.* By this expression we are here led to understand the effects of remaining unbelief on a renewed soul, or of weak faith beset with doubts and fears. Darkness here is opposed to the light of comfort, the light of joy, the light of God's reconciled countenance shining on the soul. — But this may be the uncomfortable and distressing situation of one who is at the same time a child of God, — a child of light; of one who has been *called out of darkness into God's marvellous light*; of one who has been delivered from the miseries of an unconverted state, and from that eternal darkness and horror to which such a state leads. When such a one is said

to *walk in darkness*, it of course, cannot refer to the condition of the ungenerate, nor of him who is under the wrath of God. Even when in this beclouded state he does not, in the smallest degree, forfeit the privileges of a child of God; but he *walks in darkness* so as to lose sight of the evidence of his being one of God's children, and so as to be led to question the reality of his conversion. It is not now with him as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shone upon him, and when he enjoyed the light of God's reconciled countenance.— His mountain is moved. God hath *hid his face from him and he is troubled*. The Ark itself stands firm, being founded on Christ the rock of everlasting strength, on whom whosoever buildeth shall never be confounded; but the darkness and gloom in the mind arise from a doubt and uncertainty whether the soul was ever built upon this rock. What is there in this account so unreasonable or unscriptural as to alarm the minds of any as if it implied God's punitive justice being exercised towards God's chosen people? Or that God would inflict the debt of punishment upon those on whose behalf

Christ

Christ the surety died to sustain the whole? There is not the least ground for such a supposition in our text, or in the explanation which we have given of it. Painful experience will corroborate this truth, that sometimes God's children are suffered to walk in darkness and have no light. And indeed, if we attentively consider the matter, it will rather seem matter of wonder that any living as the generality of us do, should not be led to question, at times, the reality of their conversion to God. Think a moment of the description given of the Christian, and see if a truly awakened man can well be without painful apprehension, when he can trace so few of the leading features of the Christian in his own heart and life! — Such are the scriptural descriptions given of those that are in Christ, that they are *new creatures, old things being done away, and all things become new*; — that they *have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts*, that they *through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body*—that to such Christ is *precious—whom having not seen they love*—that they *as lively stones are built up a spiritual house, &c.* — But, instead of the Christian's expe-

experience corresponding to this description; instead of that growth in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ;—that advancement in holiness and zeal, and from one degree of grace to another, which is expected and required, he finds cause to complain of the coldness, deadness, and barrenness of his heart;—that he goes backward rather than forward;—that he has lost his first love, and that the things that remain are ready to die; instead of gaining ground, he rather fears that he has been declining from luke-warmness to coldness, and that spiritual and eternal realities make far less impression on the mind than they did at first. On these accounts the soul is led to cry out, *Oh, that I knew where I might find him! Oh, that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me! When his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked thro' darkness; as I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle*.*

THAT hath no light.—By this must be meant the soul's deprivation of the enjoy-

* Job. xxiii. 3. & xxix. 2, 3.

ment of sensible comfort, seeing not one ray from whence to derive consolation when in such a state. — At such a time it is not so much his right to the promise that he disputes; 'tis not whether the chief of sinners may obtain mercy, that he calls in question; but it is the doom of a hypocrite or self-deceiver that rings in his ears; 'tis the state of one who was *once enlightened, and had tasted of the heavenly gift, and the good word of God, &c.* it is of such a one's falling away that he pines on, who, the Apostle says, *cannot be renewed again unto repentance.* And the apprehension lest this should be the case with him, is that which fills his mind with distress; which causes him to walk in darkness, and have no light.

But this leads me,

III. To point out the duty to which such is called:— *Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.*

THIS direction recalls the soul *afflicted, tossed with tempests, and not comforted*, from the unsatisfying enquiry after marks of grace;

to begin where he laid the first stone, and to attend to the same course by which he attained comfort at first. As if he said, *Return, Oh thou distressed soul, from thus poring on yourself, to behold the Lamb of God; from viewing thy unprofitableness to rejoice in the worthiness of the Lamb that was slain.—Turn thy view from thy own barrenness to the fruitful root of Jesse. — From thy fallen state, to the glorious state of thine exalted Redeemer. — From thy own darkness, to the Lord who is thy light. — From thy misery, to the Lord who is thy glory. Why then so discouraged and disquieted within thee? Still hope and encourage thyself in the Lord thy God.*

WHEN we consider the ample grounds of encouragement presented in the word of God, does it not seem strange that serious souls should be so many days in darkness, tossed on the waves of doubts, and plunged in a sea of unbelief? But let the state of the soul be ever so dark, or apparently desperate, still there is room for hope while our text holds out this encouragement, *let him that walketh in darkness and hath no light,*

light, trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.

THE word *trust*, implies a firm and unshaken confidence in the object of our dependance, and has for its basis, not any good desert, but some promise bestowed. The sinner's trust originates entirely from that infallible word on which God enables him to hope, and it is from this spring that his consolation flows. This becomes to him a sure and immoveable ground of encouragement at all times, and in the darkest seasons; whereas the consolation that is built on a person's frames, or derived from marks of grace, is, at best, a changeable felicity, liable every moment to be overcast or demolished. It is the former basis alone which animates the soul to say with the Psalmist, *but I will hope continually* *.

It was not any good done by the sinner, or change of heart wrought within him, that first encouraged him to trust in God: this would be like applying to the Physician when the cure is begun; but it is when the

* Psalm lxxi. 14.

soul is stript of all confidence in the flesh, and led to see its misery and wretchedness, that it comes to Christ by believing, and lays hold of the free word of Promise, and thence hopes in the bestowal of divine mercy. Those who have come to Christ aright, have applied to him for relief, when matters to their own apprehension have been at the worst; when all hope has failed them from every other quarter; when they saw their misery and danger as sinners; when they were convinced that *by the deeds of the law no flesh living could be justified*; when all above, beneath, around, conspired to render their case deplorable, then a ray of heavenly light darted down, and revealed Christ as a willing and all-sufficient Redeemer. The report of the gospel which the sinner had heard and despised a hundred times before, appears now to him fraught with new and inexpressible relish; he tastes a sweetness in those Promises as *exceeding great and precious* which he formerly disregarded, whilst his spirit rejoices in God his Saviour.

LET the guilty, trembling, disconsolate soul trust then in the Lord for he has ample

warrant so to do. The Promises are given him for this very purpose, they are cords of love by which many have been drawn: many of these Promises are of a most unlimited and extensive kind, reaching to all possible cases and circumstances; they are most absolute and unconditional, and as they are suited to the worst of cases, so they are addressed to the worst of characters. The Holy Spirit who takes of the things of Christ, and shews them to the soul, has enriched an innumerable company from among the chief of sinners, those who were far from righteousness, by making them heirs and partakers of the Promises. No situation in life can be found to which some Promise is not suited; no present cause of perplexity can be met with which has not been before experienced and solved.

How encouraging is the thought that none were ever rejected who trusted in the Lord! Many a guilty wretch has looked to the Lord, and been lightened of his grievous burden and galling yoke. When *the poor man cried, the Lord heard him, and delivered him out of all his distresses*. Many, who to their own apprehension have been banish-
ed

ed from every door of hope, an outcast from heaven and earth, have yet found help and safety in the Lord. Many who have at one time cried out, *Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Will he be favourable no more?* Have had their notes changed to praises to the Lord for comfort and deliverance. Many who have been as in the pit wherein there was no water, have been drawn out by the cords of the Promises. Among all those that sighed, and groaned, and went mournfully before the Lord, who have obtained deliverance, whether saints in earth, or in heaven, each will chearfully own and say, *I was brought low, but the Lord helped me. My foot had well nigh slipt, but thy mercy, O Lord, held me up.—I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice, and my supplications.* So that we may bid defiance to Satan to quote an example of one soul that was ever mistaken or rejected, who put his trust in the Lord. None of those who hung by the cord of this Promise, and refused to let it go, ever found it a frail support. All besides are broken reeds; but *the name and promise of the Lord are strong towers, into which the righteous run and are safe.* O what melancholy tidings would it be to our world,

if this cord of salvation were to yield! What howlings of despair from every believing heart! But, blessed be God, to such it is cordial enough in the greatest calamities, that Jesus is able to save to the uttermost, and that they are persuaded he is able to keep that which has been committed unto him.

THE Lord Jesus shall guide and preserve his sheep with a Shepherd's care. None of them shall perish. Where he has begun he will perform the good work, and complete it in glory. But admit the worst; supposing all your past experience to be only delusion; —that you have deceived yourself, and that you know nothing beyond the attainments of those who have fallen away in the hour of persecution and temptation; yet even in such a case you are encouraged to trust that for you there is room, that the door of mercy is still open; that *it is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save the chief of sinners*;—yea, and to hope also, that the present anguish of your mind is a token for good that the Lord will not allow you to sleep in security, or to satisfy yourself merely

merely with having a name to live. If you suspect you have been once deceived, be the more watchful against delusion, — lean less to your own understanding, wait on God, and hope for his salvation.

A FURTHER encouragement to the disconsolate soul is given in the text, when it is added, *let him stay himself upon his God.*

THIS is a most significant and consolatory address, exhorting the poor soul to cast all its burdens, and its whole weight, as it were, upon the Lord.

To *stay upon* is an expression that may allude to, and be illustrated by, one in deep waters or amidst the raging billows, who, when just ready to sink, has found some hold, but still is somewhat timorous whether he should lay all his stress upon it: in such a situation, he is assured by one capable of informing him, that it is quite sufficient to sustain his weight, and to bear him up, and therefore he stays himself upon it.

No unfit resemblance this, of a soul tossed with strong temptations, and anxious fears,
that

that finds no help but in God, who is a sure, and an all-sufficient help to them who trust in him.

STILL the soul may be overwhelmed with unbelieving doubts whether he may thus presume, or has a right to trust in God as *his* God; — let me add, therefore, that my text holds forth the warrant, and gives a command to such to cast his care upon the Lord; to roll the whole burden of all his immortal interests upon him, and to seek relief to his mind, by believing that Jesus bare the sins of many, that God hath laid his iniquities upon him; that Christ as the typical scape-goat has carried his sins away; and that having bowed his sacred head, by his death satisfied law and justice, and paid all his debt. God accounts not himself honored by unbelieving fears, but is rather grieved and provoked by them. The way for the soul to receive comfort from such a warrant as that in our text, is to consider the words with a particular application to himself; and that there is as much room in God's heart to receive him, that the divine perfections are as much engaged on his behalf,

half, that the eye of God's electing love is as much upon him, that Christ's sufferings were as much for him, and that the holy Spirit has as particular a charge concerning him, as if none besides himself were the objects of God's love, or the subjects of such blessings.

THEREFORE, amidst every billow of outward temptation; every feeling sense of inward corruption; under all the accusations of a broken law, keep fast hold of this Promise, and let it not go. Imitate Abraham, who *against hope believed in hope.*

As it was with Israel of old, when appearances were against them, they were directed to *stand still and see the salvation of God*; so when the Believer's spiritual enemies threaten to swallow him up, refuge cannot fail him whilst he stays upon his God.

UPON *his* God! This is the most comfortable word of all, and shews, that however he may suspect his sincerity, and question his interest in the love of God's heart, yet that the Lord is not unmindful of him;
that

that his covenant-love to his people is free, and immutably the same, and that such are kept by the mighty power of God, through faith, unto salvation.

THOSE suspicions and jealousies which the child of God is led, at times, to entertain, concerning his interest in God, arise from the darkness of his mind, and remaining unbelief; but in this, as in other respects, God discovers that his *thoughts are not as man's thoughts*. How amazing his tender mercies! — He reverses the sentence which men pass against themselves. This is such an indulgence as Jacob experienced when he travelled disconsolate, and the Lord revealed himself to him at Bethel; and what can be more refreshing to the mourning Christian, than when the Lord declares unto him, *I am thy God*? — This belief is of unspeakable moment and advantage to the soul, in every religious exercise and duty; this inspires consolation and joy; it is this which unites the heart to fear and love the Lord. — Who knows not the effect of this appropriation in all objects which surround us? We sometimes hear the praises
of

of an earthly king, or of one eminent for his interest, influence, and friendship; but with what indifference do we hear them, unless we can at the same time say, *there is our king and our friend?* In like manner when we behold elegant houses, valuable lands or commodities, how different our feelings when we have the title-deeds in our possession, and can put in our claim to them as our own? — The Lord thus manifests and makes over himself to his people as their God, when he gives them to experience his goodness and grace; when they renounce the dominion of all other Lords, solemnly avouch the Lord to be their God, and are inclined to say, *O Lord we are thy servants, thou hast loosed our bonds.* The Lord thus makes good his Promise to his people, willing in the day of his power, when he saith, *I will be your God, and you shall be my people.*

OF this the Christian had once a clear and satisfying discovery; but the assurance of his interest in God is hid, when, through temptation and unbelief, he walketh in darkness, 'till God again send forth his light,
and

and shine into his mind, causing the day to break, and the shadows to flee away. — Then the soul is encouraged to *trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God*; to trust in the unchangeableness of God's purposes and love; in the stability of his covenant; in the faithfulness of God to his Promises, seeing he cannot deny himself. Though the Christians love may decay, and his frames may vary, yet not so with regard to God, whose heart and love are invariably set upon his people, and whose *gifts and calling are without repentance*. It is this persuasion of God's unchangeable love that fills the experienced Believers soul with peace and joy, and encreases his fruitfulness in every good word and work; that suffers him not to lose his confidence, tho' he may some times find cause to complain that it is not with him as in months past.

I N F E R E N C E S.

FROM this subject we are led to remark in the

1. PLACE

1. PLACE, the true nature and spring of evangelical obedience. It is not the procuring cause of grace or glory: — neither can any obedience be yielded, acceptable unto God, 'till his fear is put into the heart, and his law written in the inward parts. When once the heart is made good by converting sanctifying grace, and the filial fear of God as a reconciled God and Father is implanted, then the fruits of holy and acceptable obedience appear as necessarily as light from the sun.

2. IT appears from our text, and other passages of scripture, that those who truly fear God and are dear to him, may be cast down, and their souls be in perplexity, darkness, and distress. Let none then call in question the safety of their state on account of their not having the light of evidence or comfort, for many of God's beloved people both in heaven and in earth have been thus exercised.

3. FROM the Promise in the text we infer, that for every soul-malady there is a suitable prescription in God's word.

CHRIST

CHRIST will not leave his people comfortless, but will come unto them. When they find no help in man, and the enemies of their souls would suggest that there is no help in God, he proves himself a present help in time of need; and as the sun of righteousness, he, in his own good time, will arise upon their benighted and disconsolate souls with light, and comfort, and healing in his wings.

AMIDST all the variety of cases, and troubles of soul that are to be found, yet none are overlooked by the great Physician. He provides suitable medicine for each in his word. His word finds out every patient, not only as an arrow to pierce with conviction, but also as balm to heal every bleeding wound, to cheer the soul, and impart consolation.—Let no drooping soul, then, complain that there is no hope or comfort for him, but seek to exercise faith in God's word of Promise, notwithstanding every discouragement, whilst your prayer is, *Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief!*

4. HENCE

4. HENCE we see that to fear the Lord, and yet to trust in him, are in entire consistency with each other.

THE highest degree of assurance and comfort, so far from banishing this principle of fear described in the text, strengthens and increases it. Whilst devils and ungodly men fear God and his great power, with a slavish dread, the Believer *fears the Lord and his goodness** with reverential awe, and with filial love!

5. IT may be also inferred, that though assurance of interest in the pardoning love of God, be the saint's duty and privilege to seek after the enjoyment of, yet many may belong to the character described in the text, who *fear the Lord, and obey the voice of his servant*, who may not have the comfort of this happiness, nor the enjoyment of this privilege, but may *walk in darkness, and have no light*. Tho' this state may not be inconsistent with the soul's safety, it certainly is with its comfort, and the indul-

* Hof. iii. 5.

gence of such unbelieving fears is provoking to God, and derogatory to his glory. Say then with the Prophet *, *I will look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation, my God will hear me.—Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord†. Hope thou in him, for with our God there is mercy, and with him there is plenteous redemption‡.*

* Mic. vii. 7.

† Ps. xxvii. 14.

‡ Ps. cxxx. 7.

S E R M O N XIII.

II CORINTHIANS IV. 7.

*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels,
that the excellency of the power may be of
God, and not of us.*

TH E glory of the gospel, and the weakness and unworthiness of the instruments employed in dispensing it, serve as a contrast strikingly to display the power and goodness of its divine Author. Where the disproportion is so great, the hand of God is more evidently perceived. The Lord thus secures to himself the undivided praise of all that success which his gospel has ever had in saving the souls, and subduing the corruptions, of sinful men. *Who then is Paul, and who is Appollos, but minis-*

ters by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man. Neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but G O D that giveth the increase! Or, as intimated in the text, We have this gospel treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of G O D, and not of man.

FROM these words we shall endeavour to show, why the blessings and privileges of the gospel may be accounted a treasure,—and also—on what accounts the Lord deposits this treasure in *earthen vessels*.—One reason for this is particularly assigned in the text—that *the excellency of the power may be of G O D, and not of man.*

I. THE Apostle is treating of the honourable and important trust of the gospel ministry; and it is evident that it is to this gospel he refers, by the word *treasure* in my text. The propriety of this comparison will appear in the following respects.

1. TREASURES, of different sorts, are usually hid deep in the the earth (as if providence would conceal that root of evil,
and

and prevent the wars and bloodshed they have occasioned). They are seldom to be met with without previous digging and sore toil.

AGREEABLE to this, the mystery of the gospel was *hid from ages and from generations, but is now made manifest to his saints* ;*—was hid in GOD, and would eternally have continued so, if life and immortality had not been brought to light by the gospel.

As few discoveries, truly beneficial in their nature and tendency, have been the invention of men, but rather the gift of providence ; so neither was the gospel dispensation of human invention, but an immediate discovery from heaven, and exhibiting the brightest display of the glory and grace of GOD towards sinful man. The Apostle Peter, therefore, might well say, *We have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus.* GOD left human ingenuity to its full scope for two thousand years, to try, as it were, whether

* Coll. i. 26.

it could find out the path of life. But what discovery did ever the ancient Philosophers make, either glorifying to GOD, or safe for man? Which of them ever laid a solid foundation for the sinner's hope of pardon, and acceptance with a holy GOD?—Or pointed out the way of admission into heaven? Their boasted researches after happiness were delusive, and only served to expose their ignorance and folly. We are assured in the language of inspiration, that *the world by wisdom knew not GOD*, far less could it devise the scheme of salvation, or find out the mystery of gospel grace. Hear the declaration of the inspired Apostle,—*We speak not the wisdom of this world, nor of the Princes of this world that come to nought; but we speak the wisdom of GOD in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which GOD ordained before the world unto our glory, which none of the Princes of this world knew; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which GOD hath prepared for them that love him, but GOD hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit, &c.**

2. A TREASURE is enriching, and immediately changes the outward situation of him who finds it. Though it cannot bestow happiness, it furnishes the outward appearance of it, and makes poor deluded mortals who are destitute, envy those who are its possessors. But the Treasure of the Gospel when received, makes happy not in outward appearances only, but in reality; and enriches the soul of him who finds it to all eternity; for it puts the happy man in possession of *the unsearchable riches of Christ*. *Son*, sayeth the Lord to such a one, *all that I have is thine*. The Apostle also intimates the invaluable privileges connected with the possession of this treasure, when he assures believers in his address to the Corinthians, *Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.*† Surely the most enlarged desires of the immortal soul cannot wish for a more choice inheritance than this, or share in treasures more satisfying and enriching! *The water that I shall give, saith Christ, shall be in you a well of water springing up unto*

† 1. Cor. ii. 22, 23.

everlasting life. Blessed are they, then, that hunger and thirst after the treasures of righteousness, for they shall be filled—with all the fulness of G O D.

3. EARTHLY treasures have not always fallen to the lot of the wisest, worthiest, or best of men. A sovereign, in the distribution of riches, does not always allot them to men of understanding. In many instances they are possessed without any procurement of our own, being often the effect of heritage, gift, and unlooked for turns in providence. So, with regard to this heavenly treasure of gospel grace, *not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called to possess and enjoy it; neither is it to be obtained by dint of any superior wisdom, sagacity, or intellectual abilities which one man may possess above another; but God hath chosen and called the happy objects from among the foolish, weak, base, and despised among men, that no flesh should glory in his presence, but that, according as it is written, he that glorieth let him glory in the Lord.** This heavenly

* 1 Cor. i. 26. and foll.

pearl of great price had never been found, had not GOD himself directed the search, and lighted the candle of revelation; thus *giving us the light of the knowledge of the glory of GOD in the face of JESUS CHRIST.* Thus the servant, by the light of the candle, sought and found the money that was lost *.

HENCE learn to prize GOD's word as *a light to our feet, and a lamp to our path.* Unto this we do well to take heed as to *a light shining in a dark place*; and, to the careful study of GOD's word, let us join fervent prayer to the Father of lights, that, by the rays of divine knowledge, he would be pleased to shine on his word, and in our hearts, that we may see wonderful things out of GOD's law, *rejoice in the way of his testimonies as much as in all riches*; and account the precious discoveries of the gospel of Christ as our choicest inheritance and treasure.

4. THE world's treasures seem not to be diminished; though in every age there have been rich men, and hid treasures hoarded

* Luke xv. 8.

up, they still appear to abound in the earth. Nor is this to be wondered at, *for as we brought nothing into this world, it is certain we can carry nothing out.* Riches cannot bribe the King of Terrors, or obtain a passage beyond the grave.

So, of the treasures of grace, we may, with certainty say, that they are inexhaustible. Though an innumerable company of poor, guilty, miserable sinners have been enriched by them, the stores of grace remain as full as ever; and they who, from a feeling sense of their spiritual poverty and wretchedness, repair by faith and prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ, as to the inexhaustible store-house, shall *out of his fulness receive, and grace for grace.*

THE Sun which has, ever since the creation, poured forth its beams with an uninterrupted profusion, still continues to emit them with undiminished lustre;—the ocean, which from its copious bed, has afforded those exhalations wherewith the parched earth has been refreshed with seasonable returns of showers, still remains as full as ever:

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in like manner, though liberal supplies of grace have been despenſed to the people of God in every age, ſtill, Chriſt, the treaſury, is as *full of grace* as ever. The ſaints in glory were not in the leaſt leſſened in their allowance, when ſo much of the gifts and treaſures of goſpel-grace were diſtributed on the day of Pentecoſt; nor ſhall they ſuffer the leaſt diminution of their heavenly treaſures, when all nations ſhall be enriched with the bleſſings of the goſpel, out of the fulneſs of Chriſt.

FARTHER:—By a treaſure we uſually underſtand a very large ſum, which may ſerve its poſſeſſor not only to live upon with liberality and ſplendor, but alſo, after all needful expences, to leave hundreds behind him. So, the bleſſed man who finds the treaſure hid in the field of the goſpel, has enjoyments which ſhall laſt not only in time, but alſo through all eternity. He may live upon earth as the ſon of a king; maintain the dignity of his high rank, and ſtill his ſtock remain inexhauſtible, becauſe lodged in the hands of the Truſtee who affords unlimited credit, and gives to all liberally,
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and upbraideth not. The fine gold by which he is enriched, loses nothing of its value, though he is continually drawing fresh supplies from it to help him in time of need.

5. A TREASURE is that which the heart is much set upon. Most men are eager to get it, and when obtained, how often does it engage the affections, and prove a rival to the eternal GOD! In this respect war is proclaimed against it; *if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him*: and its dangerous influence is pointed out, when the Apostle says, *Demas hath forsaken me, having loved the present world.*

So when the blessed man begins to thirst after heavenly treasure, and he perceives its worth, and his need, his heart becomes quite engaged in the pursuit. *The kingdom of heaven, saith the Lord, is like unto a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it*.* When his eyes are enlightened, and his

* Matth. xiii. 45, 46.

heart is enlivened by divine grace, he feels no rest, no peace, no comfort within, 'till he becomes a partaker of those treasures of grace which Christ imparts. He believes the truth of what Christ, who is the wisdom of God, declares, *Riches and honour are with me, yea, durable riches and righteousness, my fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold, and my revenue than choice silver* *. The earnest cry of the awakened sinner's soul is, *None but Christ, none but Christ*; and after he has found him as a Saviour to enrich and bless him, he is not the less enamoured of him, because the greater is his acquaintance with him, the more he discovers of his value, suitableness, and excellency. But we come now,

II. To enquire on what accounts this treasure is put into earthen vessels. Observe, it is not put into these vessels as a depositary, to supply the wants of others from their stock; or as if the choicest of their vessels had any redundancy of the treasure of grace to bestow upon others. — When the foolish said to the wise Virgins, *Give us of your oil*,

* Prov. viii, 18, 19.

for our lamps are gone out ; the wise answered, saying, not so, lest there be not enough for us and you ; but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

THEY are merely channels of conveyance ; honoured of GOD, indeed, and employed for the good of others ; but standing equally in need of having their own souls enriched with this gospel-treasure, as any of those to whom they are appointed to convey it. The Ministers of CHRIST, are, at best, but *earthen vessels* ; they can impart no value to, though they receive some from, the treasure put into them ; they are like potsherds in which golden treasures are laid up, or rough caskets in which precious jewels are deposited.

SEVERAL reasons may, however, be assigned why the *treasure of the gospel* is put into these *earthen vessels*, as displaying the wisdom and goodness of God ; and that, as expressed in the text, *the excellency of the power may be of GOD and not of us.*

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FOR consider, Brethren,

1. HAD Angels been the appointed dispensers of this treasure, the instruments would probably have been over-valued, and much of the powerful operation attending their ministrations, attributed to them, and thus the first and great cause of all might have been forgotten. Neither Angels nor men would have had, in that case, such striking proofs of the grandeur and glory of God, accompanying the gifts of the holy spirit in the success of the gospel, and the conversion of sinners unto God.

As this second creation, with the glorious miracles accompanying it, far exceeded the first, and magnified the power of the divine operator, yet, had Angels principally been employed as *workers together with God*, might it not, at least, have been thought that the success of the gospel derived much of its efficacy from the striking and commanding manner in which the trust was executed, and that the zeal, the eloquence, the perseverance of the angelic host had attracted

tracted the attention, and gained the hearts of men?—In this case, is it not evident, that the glory would have been divided between God and Angels, whereas he will not give his glory to another?

AGAIN;—had Beings of a different, especially of a superior and angelic nature, been entrusted with the gospel treasure, a constant tremor and dread would, at their appearance, have overwhelmed those to whom they were appointed to carry it. 'Tis no easy matter to reconcile the mind to heavenly messengers, or to be persuaded, that, upon such occasions, nothing but what is favourable is intended. I find few examples of Old or New Testament saints so courageous as to remain undaunted at their first appearance; and though they are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation, yet they are invisible, and, to us, unknown agents, 'till in the world of spirits. Nor do we find, in scripture, that the renewed manifestations of these angelic beings to the saints and servants of GOD, banished their apprehensions, or rendered them familiar with these heavenly strangers while they

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continued unbodied; but if so clothed, then this was a mode entirely different from their angelic nature; — and with such a garb of humanity, or when visible, I do not see why Satan might not transform himself into an Angel of light.

FARTHER:—If the treasure of the gospel had not been put into *earthen vessels*; 'tis not easy to conceive how Angels could adapt themselves to the comprehension of men whose capacities are so limited, and whose knowledge is not by intuition, but obtained by slow degrees, and by means of instruction poured drop by drop, as it were, into those earthen vessels. As men of superior abilities who see abstruse mysteries of science at once, are seldom accounted the fittest to communicate, or most suitable to converse with; and therefore men of greater mediocrity of talents are generally more successful in imparting instruction, in a manner suited to that in which they received it — by degrees; and inasmuch also as they are better capacitated for the exercise of patience towards learners, whilst with a steady and unwearied hand they pour in

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the liberal stream of knowledge by degrees and portions similar to the way in which their own slower understandings received it.

BESIDES; — if the treasure had not been put into *earthen vessels*, how could any other sort of commissions attain such a fellow feeling of human frailty, or exercise a needed sympathy towards those weak, sinful creatures to whom the gospel was to be preached? The Apostle himself suggests this idea when he says, *We have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin* *. A similitude of nature, yea, the same nature, seems requisite to enable the dispensers of the gospel to enter into the very spirit of those maladies, diseases, and calamities which the introduction and universal prevalence of sin have occasioned, and which the gospel of Christ is so admirably suited to remove. — Yea, so far as we are capable of conceiving, or may be allowed to reason, something beyond this seems necessary; — even that one of the same nature should have been in the

* Heb. iv. 15.

very same circumstances with those to whom the treasures of the gospel-grace were to be dispensed.

A PHYSICIAN who has felt the acute pain of the stone, or suffered an amputation, would, we might well suppose, be most tender, and best-suited towards those in such distressing circumstances. In like manner, was not this one end to be accomplished in Peter's being permitted to stumble and fall, that, on his recovery from his back-slidings, he might strengthen his brethren?

REFLECT, farther;—that the language of the celestial host would have been too lofty, their speech too sublime, and not easily translated into the language of mortals. It is true, they spake as with tongues when they announced the Saviour's birth to the shepherds of Bethlehem, and sang praises to God in the highest; as well as when they appeared at our Lord's sepulchre, and upon other occasions; however, as the speech which Angels use is far superior to the sounds which we call language, were they employed in unfolding the mysteries of grace and

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redemption, they might soon soar above the comprehension of human understandings, (therefore, Paul, when he was caught up to the third heaven, intimates that he *heard unspeakable words, which it was not lawful, or more properly, possible, for a man to utter* *. They were words unutterable, partly thro' the grandeur of the subject, and also because of the narrow bounds of human language, in all the compass of metaphors, images, and similitudes): so also, if these angelic beings were the appointed messengers, they would be apt to borrow allusions from the spiritual world, and the heavenly subjects in which they were always conversant. But so far is this from being a way suited to communicate the treasure of the gospel to the advantage of the ignorant sinful men, that the Apostle Paul; though divinely inspired, and possessed of every advantage which knowledge and mental ability could afford him, preferred the utmost plainness and simplicity of style, and purposely *shunned the enticing words of man's wisdom*; doubtless, that *the excellency of the power* attending the preaching and success

of the gospel, might more evidently appear to be of *G O D*, and not of *man*.

2. AN important end which the Lord intends to answer by putting the treasure of the gospel into *earthen vessels*, is, that men poor and destitute may be enriched and filled. The law of *G O D* extends to all earthly treasures, in that injunction, *thou shalt not covet*; but the treasure which my text speaks of is exempted from that prohibition; yea, there is an order from heaven to covet this, and to break through every obstacle in order to attain it. Many who have been made sensible of their spiritual poverty, and believed the report that an inestimable treasure is hid in the field of the gospel, have had no rest 'till they have found it. The miser never was more anxious about his treasures of gold, than the convinced soul is desirous of the treasures of grace. The thief forgot all the booty he had wrongfully acquired, while, in pursuit of this heavenly treasure, he looked on Jesus suspended on the cross, wrestled powerfully, and by the violent hand of faith obtained a glorious prize. If a robbery, it was one for which

he was never prosecuted. *The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.*

3. *WE have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the treasure itself, not the vessel in which it is put, might engross our attention and regard. Sometimes, with unthinking men, the messenger is more taken notice of than the message he conveys. This was a fault which the great Apostle seemed zealous to prevent, accounting himself nothing that Christ might be All. It is what he severely checks, imputing it to nothing else than the carnality of the heart. For ye are yet carnal; for whereas there is among you envying and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal? Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but GOD gave the increase. So then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but*

but *GOD that giveth the increase* *. In like manner, my brethren, will the most eminent Ministers, and devoted servants of Christ, be most studious to keep themselves out of view that He may be magnified;—to preach Christ, not themselves;—to display the glories of the Messiah, not the eloquence or choice gifts with which the Ambassador may be endowed; and for this end, they will purposely avoid the enticing words of man's wisdom, and preach the truth as it is in Jesus with simplicity and plainness of speech.

4. *THE treasure is in earthen vessels*, to magnify the power and providence of God. These *earthen vessels* are continually breaking.—*Our fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live for ever?* Nevertheless, the Lord of the vineyard still watches over the Church and its interests, so that, amidst all the revolutions which take place, all that frequent turning from vessel to vessel, there is no lack of the heavenly treasure. Tho' many of God's precious jewels are still hid in the persons of the unknown elect; yet all will be recovered, since the candle is

* 1 Cor. i. 13, & xxxiii. 7.

lighted, and diligent search is making, by means of a preached gospel, after them. Now, what short of omnipotence could thus preserve his own, and prevent the gates of hell from prevailing against them?—I might add,

5. THAT the value of the treasure, in GOD's account, appears, inasmuch as he has fashioned so many *earthen vessels* for the honourable trust. Allow me to say, that this was no small cost to the great Proprietor at the first display of this treasure by a preached gospel. The Apostle Paul cries out, *Who is sufficient for these things? But our sufficiency is of God.*

DOES it fill the mind with wonder, and admiration of the power and glory of GOD, to behold the vaulted firmament bedecked with shining lamps to give light to this globe of earth? And may I not add, that it is a glorious view even to angelic minds amidst their celestial splendour, to behold, from amongst *earthen vessels*, lamps formed, and placed in the temple of GOD's Church on earth, all filled with more or less of requisite oil,

oil, dispensing singly the needful light to the travellers Zionward ;—all employed, filled, and furnished by GOD ; all fixed and appointed by him in their proper stations as they shall be most useful and needed. — Surely this manifests a power not inferior to that which created the heavens with all their luminaries ! This shews GOD's tender regard, and great value for Zion, and its spiritual prosperity !

6. THE Lord provides, and dispenses, spiritual treasure, by means of *earthen vessels*, to draw our attention from the transitory goods of this vain world ;—to excite Christians to walk worthy of the high vocation wherewith they are called ; and to give them a foretaste of the inheritance of the saints in light.

MEN, in general, are much attached to a present stock, and enamoured with the word *treasure*. The Lord here condescends to their wish, and says, *Since nothing will satisfy you but a treasure, lo, I have provided one sufficient to enrich millions of worlds ; and all the return I demand for this kindness,*
is,

is, that you take possession of it ; that you prize it ; that you let go that dross on which you so much dote ; that you withdraw your affections from such an unsuitable good, and set them on those things which are spiritual, heavenly, and divine.

BUT, does the Lord furnish his people, while upon earth, with the spiritual treasures of his grace ? What an excitement is this for them to live like themselves — conformable to their exalted dignity as the presumptive heirs to crowns of glory !

THE Lord, who of his free grace and rich mercy adopted the Christian, well knew that as he appointed him an inheritance in the future world, he must afford him every thing suitable in this, seeing that he naturally is and has nothing. 'Tis this heavenly treasure that provides him with the robe he wears ; 'tis hence, as from the true treasury of indulgences, he receives the pardon of all his sins ; 'tis hence, he has grace to help him in every time of need, and derives a supply of all his returning wants, whether temporal or spiritual. As having nothing
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in himself, yet, by repairing empty-handed to the Lord Jesus Christ the glorious Treasurer and Dispenser of all grace, he receives out of his fullness grace for grace.

WITH this supply of the Spirit of JESUS CHRIST, the Believer is enabled to *walk worthy of the vocation wherewith he is called, and to adorn the doctrine of GOD our Saviour in all things.*

THUS also by means of those valuable and spiritual treasures the Lord now imparts to his people, he gives them a foretaste of their future and eternal inheritance. Though the Believer lives by faith and not by sense, yet he has, in some happy favoured moments, a drop of heaven let into his earthen vessel; and though I wish none to build on their experience, still I wish them a more abundant enjoyment of heaven upon earth—the spirit of adoption, the earnest of their future inheritance.

THE treasure or flock is lodged in the hands of Christ the Trustee, and is dispensed by the stewards of his own choice, even *the Ministers*

Ministers of CHRIST, the stewards of the mysteries of GOD. Many, from happy experience, have found treasures of consolation, and have had cause to bless GOD that the treasure was in *earthen vessels*; and that he was pleased to make some weak servant the instrument of conveying seasonable strength and comfort to become a *helper of their faith and joy.*

I M P R O V E M E N T.

1. Is such an invaluable treasure made known and provided to enrich the souls of poor perishing sinners? How great must be the prevalency of unbelief, that it is, notwithstanding, so generally neglected and despised! Here, in the gospel, are durable riches and righteousness. But, tho' these treasures are unfolded by the Ministers of Christ; though the Lord hath provided a *feast of fat things full of marrow*; though the voice of infinite compassion this day sounds in our ears *lo, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price;*
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and though the Lord is by his word, by his spirit, by his messengers, counselling us to *buy of him gold tried in the fire that we may be rich, and white raiment that we may be clothed, &c.* Yet, alas! the generality among us despise all this counsel; and the reason is, because such say, *that they are rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and know not that they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.* They are affected in a manner widely different with things present and visible. If any one of you had been informed of a mine—of a treasure, within the reach of ordinary industry, and practicable to be obtained, would you not hear of this for yourselves? Is there one who would not wish to seek after; or, at least, to have a share therein? And so, my Brethren, were your eyes opened to discern, and your hearts inclined to seek after the *pearl of great price, or the treasure which is hid in the field of the gospel, you would act the part of that merchant who, when he had found this pearl or treasure, went and sold all that he had, and bought them;—you would count all things else but loss and dung that ye might win Christ.* To what other
cause,

cause, then, but to the hardness of the heart, and the power of unbelief, can it be ascribed, that, whilst such a treasure is within reach, so many should remain, in a spiritual sense, wretched, miserable, blind, and naked? Oh the folly! Oh the blindness to which sin has reduced the human race! That the empty baubles, and transient vanities of a present world, should engross so much of their time and regard, while things that are unseen, infinitely more momentous, while the treasures of eternity are scarcely accounted worthy of a thought!

IT is to be allowed, that the treasure, which my text speaks of, has no connection with coffers, or the filling of them (and hence it is so much undervalued); but if you are enriched with spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus, you will be raised above an anxious desire after them, and will learn to be contented with food and raiment, saying with Esau, *I have enough.*

2. IF such treasures are made known in the gospel, how deficient are many Christians in the use and improvement of those
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privileges and blessings they are called to enjoy! — Every time they hear the gospel preached, they have, as it were, a draught on heaven put in their hands for a fresh supply of grace treasured up in, and dispensed by JESUS CHRIST, which is still answered to the happiness and comfort of many Christians, who, perhaps, are richer than we. And why should not we, also, be stimulated to covet the best gifts which heaven has to bestow? To seek after grace and more grace? And, forgetting the things which are behind, be pressing towards the mark, whilst we improve every blessing we receive to the glory of our GOD and SAVIOUR?

3. SINCE the Lord hath seen fit that the *treasure* of the gospel should be in *earthen vessels*, then we infer how unreasonable and ungrateful it must be in any to undervalue the treasure on this account. The kindness and condescension of GOD so visible in this constitution ought rather to engage your admiration, gratitude, and love, when the Lord employs for his messengers men of like passions with yourselves. And, though
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in themselves considered, they are weak, *earthen vessels*, yet while the excellency of the power is in GOD, the instrument, be it what it may, cannot but be sufficient.—Let me add,

4. THIS encouraging consideration, that though the treasure be in *earthen vessels*, liable every moment to be marred and broken, yet there is no cause to dread any prejudice to the treasure on this account. Though we have to say, *Our Fathers, where are they? And the Prophets, do they live for ever?* Yet, the great head of the Church still provides a succession of faithful men from age to age: and of this we may rest assured, that so long as he has treasures of grace to dispense, vessels to convey them will never be wanting.

TO CONCLUDE.—Christ, in his gospel, and I, in his Name, assure those who continue poor without righteousness, and naked without a garment; without pardon, without holiness, without a new nature, without grace, and without hope, that they may yet find an enriching treasure. 'Tis to such poor, naked,

naked, starving, miserable souls, that the gospel is preached, and for such, the unsearchable riches of CHRIST are displayed. O come then, whilst mercy invites, and the gospel sounds in your ears, come to JESUS who has every blessing to bestow;—wisdom to the ignorant, pardon to the guilty, sanctification to the unholy, present peace, and eternal happiness. *My GOD shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by CHRIST JESUS. AMEN.*

S E R M O N XIV.

PROVERBS IV. 18.

*But the path of the just is as the shining light,
that shineth more and more unto the perfect
day.*

TRULY, says the wise man, *the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.* A transition from a state of darkness, to a state of light, how desirable and important ! If natural light be so useful ; if the advantages of it are, in every point of view, so many and great ; we may take occasion to infer, how much more desirable it is for the soul to have the light of a spiritual life ;—for the sun of righteousness to arise with healing in his wings ; and to have the rays of divine knowledge beaming forth from *the Father of lights* into the

the sinner's dark understanding, and from thence displaying itself with progressive clearness and lustre throughout every part of the Believer's journey, and in every step he takes from earth to heaven! Such happiness does that soul enjoy upon whom *the sun of righteousness arises with healing in his wings; whom the day-spring from on high hath visited, giving light to him that sits in darkness and in the shadow of death, and guiding his feet into the way of peace.* While the way of the wicked is in darkness, and they know not at what they stumble; walking in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; while destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace they have not known; on the other hand, the path of the just is described in my text to be as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

WORDS these, which, in general, intimate the progressive tendency of the Believer's life in the paths of godliness. As the sun appears to advance in the firmament, the

light grows clearer and clearer. Though it may meet with obstructions, and be for a while darkened by intervening clouds, yet such is its general nature. Thus also it is with the righteous. Though temptations and declensions may at times retard his progress, and divert him from pursuing the narrow path, nevertheless the *habitual* desire of the renewed soul will be to *press forward towards the mark*; and to *run so as that he may at last obtain the prize*.

THIS idea we shall farther endeavour to illustrate in attending to our text, from which we propose, *First*, briefly to describe the character of *the just*; *Secondly*, to survey the path which they tread; and, *Thirdly*, to remark that the progress which the just make in this path, is most properly compared to the morning and *shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day*.

First, we shall briefly describe the character of *the just*.

LET it be here observed, that it is not in a legal, but in an evangelical sense, that any
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of Adam's fallen posterity can be styled *just*. In the former respect, *there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not* *. Such, therefore, as are not *just*, or righteous by nature, are made so by grace. They become sensible of the wrongs and injury they have done unto God; that they have robbed his honour; walked contrary to his laws, and can make no reparation for their opposition to his government, and the debt which they have contracted. They are persuaded, by the illumination of the Spirit of God, that all their attempts to make restitution are unavailing, having *nothing to pay*; and that it is through him alone who *suffered, the just for the unjust*, that their debt of sin and punishment can be cancelled, and that they can obtain favour or acceptance with God.

HENCE, then, *the just*, distrusting, and renouncing all dependance on themselves, and convinced of their unrighteousness in the sight of God, lean on the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ; depending wholly on his merits, and building all their hopes

* Eccles. vii. 20.

of pardon and salvation on what he hath done, and suffered on the sinner's behalf. And not only so, but *the just*, being interested in the righteousness, and renewed by the spirit, and strengthened by the grace of Christ, make conscience of working righteousness; they not only trust in Christ for their justification, but also look to, and derive assistance from him for the production of holiness. They *watch and pray that they enter not into temptation*, and carefully mark each step they take, lest they tread upon forbidden ground. But if, at any time, their feet are caught by the snares which their spiritual enemies lay for their halting, yet they arise again: they lie not contented in the hands of their enemies, 'till the Lord *restoreth their souls, and leadeth them in the paths of righteousness for his own Name's sake*. But this brings me,

Secondly, to survey the path of the just.

WE may premise here, that before the *Captain of salvation*, pointed out and led the way, there was no path to heaven. The gates were barred against, and admission refused

refused to the sinful children of men. It is the gospel of Christ that proclaims a way, and a highway. Here the gates of righteousness are opened for the just to enter in*. Had not the Redeemer of sinners interposed by his precious blood, and revealed himself as *the way* to the Father, to heaven, and eternal life, all correspondence must have failed, and all communication between heaven and earth must have been for ever cut off. But now we are emboldened to *enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us, through the vail, that is to say, his flesh*†. Thus as Christ hath found, so

1. HE hath *marked* the path in which the righteous are to tread.

THEY are not allowed to walk at random, nor to pursue their own foolish inventions, or corrupt imaginations. The course they are to keep, is marked out by the hand of infinite wisdom, and measured by the line of eternal righteousness. It is a *strait* path, neither turning to the right or

* Ps. cxviii. 19.

† Heb. x. 19, 20.

left hand, Hence the wise man's direction,
*Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine
 eye-lids look straight before thee : ponder the
 path of thy feet ; and let all thy ways be esta-
 blished. Turn not to the right-hand nor to
 the left, remove thy foot from evil**. The
 path is on every side *hedged in with thorns* ;
 namely, warnings and threatenings of pu-
 nishment on those who err and stray from
 God's ways. Nor can any one wander from
 the strait and appointed path, without feel-
 ing the painful smart of disobedience.

It is a path for its *plainness*. Hence it is
 said, that *the way-faring men, though fools,
 shall not err therein*†. Our glorious Cap-
 tain and Forerunner has himself paved e-
 very step of the way. There is no stage of
 the Christian's journey ; there is no difficul-
 ty he is to lay his account with, in which his
 Leader hath not given direction, and pro-
 mises of strength, and set before us *an ex-
 ample that we should follow his steps*. To
 him, indeed, it was a painful and a dange-
 rous road. Every step of it was among
 briars and thorns by which he was torn :

* Prov. iv. 25, 26, 27.

† Isa. xxxv. 8.

never.

nevertheless, he persisted in the glorious way in the midst of difficulty and danger, and hath, in consequence, opened the gates of heaven to all Believers,

THIS path, also, to his people, lies much of it *up hill*. There is no avoiding this: neither must they, on account of it, attempt to turn aside, or to take another course, either by leaning to the right, or verging to the left hand. Whatever difficulties, or however many the crosses are which may be met with in the appointed path to heaven, Christ expressly declares, *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake, shall find it**. And again, *If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple†*. Though there are many professed disciples who, like foolish sheep, attempt to leap aside, and

* Matth. xvi. 24, 25.

† Luke xiv. 26, 27.

shun the Cross which God lays in their way, yet this is directly contrary to the will of Christ, and cannot but be provoking unto him. Many steps which the Christian is to take in the path to heaven lie so immediately up-hill, that nature recoils, and cries out, *It is impossible I can ever hold on, or hold out. I can never mount the steep ascent, nor climb this hill of difficulty. Surely I must stop my course, or find an easier road.* But when the Lord reaches forth the mighty hand of his power, then that which before appeared impossible immediately becomes easy.

AND let it be considered, my Brethren, that the path is no more difficult to us who follow after, than it was to those who have gone before. To hesitate, or to delay entering on this path 'till every mountain of difficulty is levelled, or the thorns of opposition die away, would be as preposterous a conduct as that of the man who is represented as waiting at the river's brink, and delaying to pass it till the water ceased to run. Scripture expressly declares, that *we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom* *; and that *strait is the gate, and nar-*

* Acts xiv. 22.

*row is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there are that find it *.*

As the path in which the just are to go, is so plainly marked out, that the *way-faring man, though a fool, need not err*, there is at the same time more *security* afforded to travellers heavenward than to those pursuing an earthly journey. To prevent wandering from the path, which is ever dangerous on a journey, there is a *map* put into the hand of each heaven-bound traveller, where every stage of the journey, and what fare may be expected, is accurately inserted; where also all needed directions is given how the traveller is to conduct himself. A heavenly *guide* is also appointed, who kindly performs his office, to lead every traveller in the path to the land of uprightness; and who, by his *still small voice* whispers to them in the hour of danger, so that their *ears hear a word behind them, saying, this is the way, walk ye in it, when they turn to the right hand, and when they turn to the left* †. This kind guide performs his office to the heavenly traveller

* Matth. vii. 14.

† Isa. xxx. 21.

without fee or reward. Never did any such mistake one foot-step of the way, without either unskilfulness in the knowledge of the map, or turning an inattentive and deaf ear to this heavenly guide.

BUT farther; in the prescribed path for the righteous to walk in, there are proper *stages*, all along the road, *for refreshing weary travellers* when they grow faint or fatigued.

THE church is that Inn to which the tender SAMARITAN sends them. Here are *wells of salvation*: here is *the bread of life*; and that *new wine* of the kingdom which cheers the hearts of heaven-born souls. Many a strengthening meal have they on these spiritual dainties before they arrive at HOREB; many gospel ordinances are instituted on purpose to invigorate and recruit their strength, and fit them for prosecuting their journey. And are there not many who have found, to their comfortable experience, that, when they had almost fainted, and given up their hope, they have hereby renewed their spiritual strength, so as to *mount up as on eagles wings, to run without*

without weariness, and to walk without fainting in the path to heaven?

2. NUMBERS are treading in this path.

THOUGH there are but few comparatively, and we may justly lament the multitudes going another road; yet, when collected together, the travellers in the path to heaven (those who have gone before, who are now treading it, and who shall follow after,) will be found to be *such a company that no man can number.* Many, we trust, are now following the Lamb, not in the more easy paths of obedience merely, but *whithersoever he goeth*; yea, who cheerfully *go without the camp, bearing his reproach.* This is a consideration which ought to recommend the path to us; for nothing is more desirable during a journey, than agreeable company. The circumstance of being fellow travellers has often beguiled the length of the way. Differences here are as uncomfortable and improper as if passengers in a stage-coach were to quarrel with one another during their journey together.

3. THOSE

3. THOSE who tread this path are all going forward to the city of habitation above.

NONE are, in reality, altogether at a stand, or going backward. Those who turn back, were never on the road. They only appeared so to others by the profession which they made. Such the Apostle refers to when he says, *these went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.** Such may another day seek to enter into the gate of heaven, but, having never trodden the path that led to it, they shall not be able. Like Israel that sought amiss, they shall fall short of the promised rest. Some there are that only appear to be in this path: and others who have trodden it may indeed, for a season, be chargeable with declensions and back-slidings, and be overpowered by the force of indwelling sin and temptation, like

* 1 John ii. 19

dark clouds obscuring the light of the sun; but such as are made evangelically righteous, and are partakers of the saving grace of God, shall not go back, or leave the path so as to apostatise from God, being kept by his mighty power, through faith unto salvation. Hence, saith the Apostle, *the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them that draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.**

THOUGH many of God's children have complained that they made no progress, and, to their own apprehension, seemed to be going backwards, yet, even in the midst of such complaints and fears, they have been still advancing, and making some way, though insensibly.

4. THOSE who are travelling in the heavenly path are all pilgrims.

THEY have no permanent interest in the country through which they pass, account-

* Heb. x. 38, 39.

ing it a wildreness, a foreign and a barren land. They long to reach home, and to be at rest. They well know that *this is not their rest, because it is polluted*—that here they sojourn but for a season;—are passing through this world as a thoroughfare, with a view of arriving, e'er long, at the promised land.

5. LET me add, that this is a path in which they who take the morning of life, and set out the earliest, generally have the easiest and most comfortably journey.

NOT but that others, who do not tread in it 'till even the eleventh hour, may be filled with peace, and joy, and consolation. But let it, at the same time, be remembered, that there are some precious Promises peculiarly given to such as set out in the season of youth. *I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me.* I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, &c.†*

* Prov. viii. 17.

† Jer. ii. 2.

I PROCEED now, in the THIRD place, to remark, that the progress which the just make in this path, is most properly compared to the morning and *shining light*, that *shineth more and more unto the perfect day*. FOR

1. LIGHT is entirely the work, and the effect of God. It is he who at first commanded the light to shine out of darkness: that said, *Let there be light, and there was light*. This was a work worthy of God, and was a striking proof and display of his omnipotence. And no less immediately from God is that light and life by which a Christian is put into the path, and enabled to prosecute his journey towards heaven. It was his grace that dawned upon, and a ray of divine illumination that darted into, the benighted soul, and caused the shadows of ignorance, error, and unbelief to flee away. And no man ever contributed more to the creation of spiritual than of natural light. If we take scripture, or the experience of all the saints for our rule of judgment, we must acknowledge that the one springs as immediately from God as the other.

B b

ther. And as the natural light struck out of darkness continues, and shall continue to shine 'till the end of all things, so the light of life imparted to the soul in the morning of conversion shall never be extinguished.

THERE was no disposition in any soul to catch the vital flame. We are not naturally like the tinder which kindles almost naturally; nor is the soul enlightened by the spirit of God, like the day mentioned by the Prophet, *Neither clear nor dark**; but it is, as intimated in my text, like *the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

2. THE light, we know, breaks gradually; and, from its first appearance, 'till noon-day, advances and increases towards meridian lustre. Such is its general nature and tendency, though clouds may at times interpose to obscure it.

No sight can be at once more grand and beautiful than the sight of the rising day, when the *eye-lids of the morning* begin to

* Zachar. xiv. 6.

open,

open, and when the curtains of the night are drawn aside from the windows of the east. How pleasing to behold light arising, as it were, from a fountain; the day as yet in its infancy, and just issuing like the *dews from the womb of the morning*, spreading itself over the face of the heavens with crimson, and blushing gradually with red as it advances, giving us thereby the joyful intimation that the sun is once more to arise, and that another day is about to be bestowed on the inhabitants of a guilty world! How cheering must this be, especially to those remote nations of the earth who for many days sit in darkness without the reviving rays of the sun! No wonder though the faintest rays of the morning light should revive their spirits who are thus disinherited of day, and so long without the reach of the great lamp of heaven, as the certain presage that they shall enjoy both the one and the other!

How justly, in this view, is *the path of the just*, compared to the morning and *the shining light*! In such a gradual and imperceptible manner does the day of grace some-

times display itself. *The kingdom of God in the converted soul cometh not with observation**: nor does a bright meridian sun break forth in the dawning of the day. As this would be in contradiction to the established rule in the government of the natural world, and might prejudice the sight; so there may be the wisest reasons for this part of the divine procedure, when he, who at first *commanded the light to shine out of darkness*, thus gradually pours the light of saving truth upon the understanding of the man born spiritually blind — the new creature, newly *translated from the kingdom of darkness, and brought into God's marvellous light*. He that knows our frame and frailty is pleased thus to accommodate himself to our present imbecility, in enlightening the mind gradually, whilst the Believer upon earth, even though at the height of his stature, can only *see as through a glass darkly*. How imperfect, at first, were the views of the most eminent Christians! Saw they not spiritual objects, like the blind man, as *trees walking*? How weak their faith! How cold their love! How faint their desires! — Like *the bruised*

* Luke xvii. 20.

reed, or resembling *the smoaking flax*: tho' afterwards they *spread forth their roots as Lebanon*, were fat and flourishing, and arrived at *the fulness of perfect men in Christ Jesus*, yet once they were *babes in Christ*, and feeble plants in his vineyard. Weaker Christians, seeing the zeal, and observing the knowledge and love of those more advanced, are too apt to conclude against themselves, because their attainments are smaller. But how improper this, if the path of the just be as *the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day*, for one just entered on the path, and on whose soul light hath but just begun to dawn, to expect all at once to equal those who have been long standing in the Church; who have endured many a stormy blast of opposition and temptation, and become *rooted and grounded in the faith and hopes of the gospel*! As well might a child argue against his existence because not a man, or one recovered but lately from a fever, call in question his cure, because not able to run without weariness in a race with others in the vigour of youth.

WE observed, that the light of the day being gradual, advanced and increased towards meridian lustre; insomuch, that when no cloud interposes, not one moment is precisely the same, the sun still, to appearance, mounting higher in the firmament, and pouring in its exuberant rays, a greater flood of glory, thereby occasioning a continued augmentation of light as well as of heat. How beautifully is the path of the just compared to this in our text! The Christian, once enlightened in the knowledge of Christ, is never at a stand. To go backwards instead of forwards, would be as unnatural as the shadow of the sun on *Hezekiah's* dial. No; the real Christian is not, like *Joshua's* sun, to stand still in the firmament; far less like *Hezekiah's* to go ten degrees backward; but is to be a resemblance of that glorious luminary described by the Psalmist, *which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race; whose going forth is from the end of heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it* *. He is to gather fresh light, and heat, and strength in his progress; and every fresh advance-

* Psalm xix. 5, 6.

ment he makes in the paths of the Lord, is to accelerate him in his continued improvement.

MANY passages in the word of God represent the righteous as going *from strength to strength**; intimate that *they shall flourish like the palm-tree, and grow like a cedar in Libanon*; and that *those that are planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God*; that *they shall still bring forth fruit in old age, and be fat and flourishing*†. That they shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall‡: that the righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger§: that they abide in Christ, and so bring forth much fruit||: that they grow as the lilly, and cast forth their roots as Libanon** : yea, they are compared to a heavenly luminary, though with a borrowed light, when they are exhorted to *shine as lights in the world*¶. When once the *candle of the Lord* is lighted in the breast of the just, they dwell no more

* Ps. lxxxiv. 7. † Ps. xcii. 12, 13, 14. ‡ Mal. iv. 2.
§ Job xvii. 19. || John xv. 5. ** Hos. xiv. 5.
¶ Phil. ii. 15.

in darkness, but shed around a brighter lustre in proportion to the degrees of grace they have received. Hence the exhortation to the Church, and those converts of whom it is composed, is, *Arise, shine: for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee* *.

3. THE *path of the just* may be compared to the *shining light*, as this serves to discover objects which would not otherwise be perceived.

IMAGINE to yourselves a man on a dung-hill where were different sorts of obnoxious and venomous creatures; or a man lying on the verge of a precipice: neither of these situations would cause fear or terror, were his eye-lids sealed up in total darkness. But let once the glimmerings of day enter, and his eyes begin to open, to unfold to view the scene before him, and he will shudder at his situation. And thus it is with the soul: while *the strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace*; while gross darkness and ignorance overspread the soul, no wonder if the sinner stumbles, and knows

* Isa. lx. 1.

not whether he goes. To this, as to the sole cause, is to be attributed that peace which he hath who sleeps on in sin; for were his eyes once enlightened, he could give no slumber to his eye-lids, so long as he remains utterly uncertain, whether his next breath may not waft him into the regions of eternal death and despair. Could he have peace while so many vipers breed in his heart, had he the exercise of the spiritual senses? Could he allow them, without complaint, to suck, as it were, the blood of his soul, and to prey on his very vitals? But when the sinner is brought to walk in the path to heaven, then divine light breaks in on his soul, and makes most important discoveries: then he is awaked out of his lethargy, and is alarmed with a sight and sense of his past danger, and earnestly cries for deliverance, and seeks after a way of escape. 'Tis by means of this heavenly light imparted, that the soul is drawn to the view of the glorious prospects opened in the gospel of Christ: then the soul believes and tastes the sweetness of the Promises, and, in some measure, enjoys before hand
the

the good things which are contained in them.

4. *THE path of the just* is fitly compared to light, for the *pleasure* it yields to those who tread it.

TRULY, says the wise man, *the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun* *. Though we who enjoy it think but little of it, yet they who are deprived of it are sensible of its value. At what price would not the blind, if possible, purchase it? Who does not feel for such, that beholds the spring advance, or the summer's sun pour a flood of splendor, and giving an additional beauty to every object? But with how much superior delight does a Christian behold spiritual objects when in God's light he sees light, and enjoys the beamings of his reconciled countenance? To accommodate the words of Sheba's Queen in reference to Solomon's glory, such may say, *I believed not the words until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and behold the half was not told me* †.

* Eccles. xi, 7.

† 1 Kings x. 7.

THERE is not a greater difference between a man pining with thirst looking on the picture of a spring of water, or with hunger on a rich entertainment, or the representation of a fine country on a map, and his passing thro' and having possessions in that country, or feasting on the entertainment, and drinking of the spring; than there is between the apprehensions of a convert in whose heart *God hath shined to give the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ*, from what he formerly imagined when ignorant of God, and of the pleasure to be enjoyed in walking in his righteous ways.

IF sitting at the feet of a Philosopher so much charms the student, while his Master throws new light upon dark and abstruse subjects; what cause is there to wonder though a believer should be transported, when he sees the most interesting subjects in a new and true light? When his heart becomes affected with those truths to which he formerly gave a cool and lifeless assent? When his soul glows in love to, and his desires now roused pant after God, even the living

living God? While *beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, he is changed into the same image?*

THE speculative knowledge he formerly had of these things only served to puff him up; but he now becomes as a little child sitting at his master's feet, and though pleased with those discoveries which the Lord hath imparted to him, still he is sensible of much ignorance remaining in him, and that he knows nothing yet as he ought.

5. WHILE the light of day lasts, men go on their way about their lawful business; thus the traveller to Zion runs in the path allotted him when he continues to receive communications of light and grace.

AMIDST nature's gloom, when *the shadows of the evening are stretched out*, persons generally repose from the business of the day, or the prosecution of a journey. And whilst the sinner continues in *the region and shadow of death*, before heavenly light breaks in upon his benighted soul, to lead and to guide him, he doth not find the strait gate,
nor

nor take one step in the path to heaven. The ways of peace he knoweth not 'till guided thither by the spirits beaming light. He may toil and sweat on either side of the way, but cannot enter while he continues in darkness, and to love the ways thereof. As Jesus is *the way*, so is he also *the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the spiritual world*. And all his people have the benefit, in some degree or other, of that spiritual and saving light which he imparts. Hence they are called *children of the light and of the day*.

BUT when this sun is clouded, and the light obscured, they walk with a heavy heart, and a slower pace, like the *Egyptians* chariots that were drawn on heavily. As some Christians have many and long stages to take in pursuing the narrow path to heaven, so they find their course through them accompanied with different degrees of light and comfort. Some enjoy the light of his countenance, and, with *Habakkuk*, in the want of outward comforts, *rejoice in the God of their salvation*; while others comparatively, *walk in darkness and have no light*;

light; they go mourning all the day long, and crying out, *Oh that I knew where I might find him!* But, let such as are thus disquieted within them, *be of good cheer*, and exhorted still to *trust in the Lord*. If you have reason to hope that the sun of righteousness ever arose upon you, you shall be carried on, and carried through your pilgrimage journey, and *thy God shall be thy glory*. Keep your eye ever fixed on the great atoning sacrifice. *Behold the Lamb of God* who is the appointed way to the kingdom. Assert, by faith, your claim to him. Urge, and pass not from it. Being persuaded of the Promises, and having embraced them, cleave to them, and do not let Christ, in the Promise, go.

6. As it is eye-sight which enables us to behold the natural light, without which it would be of no use to us; so the Lord not only prescribes *the path of the just*, but also gives him spiritual discernment, and thus capacitates him to walk in it.

A BLIND

A BLIND man stumbles at noon-day: 'tis to him the same as night; the light can be of no advantage to him while deprived of eye-sight. Thus we find the natural man, destitute of spiritual light and life, treading on forbidden ground, despising and standing fearless on the brink of danger, and courting destruction.

AND though we were to cry out to him, and warn him, as one that is blind, yet he neither sees nor hears, nor can we lead him into the right path, for the Lord only can open the eyes of the blind. Though many suppose that nothing more is necessary than an external revelation to lead men into the right path, yet woeful experience and observation prove how far men, with every advantage of this sort, may wander from God and the paths of righteousness. But when the Lord gives spiritual eye-sight to discern the right path, and thus leads the enlightened and converted soul into the ways of peace, then he is as one who enjoys all the advantages of clear-sight at noon-day: he is enabled to keep an even course, and escape those dangers on his right-hand and

on

on his left, to which he would otherwise have been exposed. Thro' Christ strengthening him, his footsteps are upheld, and he is invigorated to press through the difficulties in his way, and to persevere in his Christian course, 'till he arrives safe at the Canaan of rest above.

BUT, let it be remarked, that though the external light which Revelation points out, is not of itself sufficient to lead sinful men to walk in the right path; yet surely it gives advantages superior to those of others who are without this help, else there would be no more guilt contracted by those who sin against God under the gospel-revelation, than by Heathens who are entirely deprived of it. Unconverted sinners, though both deaf and blind, are represented in scripture as wilfully shutting their eyes and their ears*; and not only as not improving the mercies they enjoy, but as actually opposing themselves to, and rejecting the counsels of God. *It is this bitter and melancholy reflection, that is as the worm that never dies, but continually preys upon the condemned sinner's*

* Isa. lxiii. 8. Prov. i. 24, &c.

conscience. *It is this* which gives such weight to our Lord's declaration, when he says, *If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin, but now they have no cloke for their sin. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father **. And when he elsewhere declares, *This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil†!* *It is this* which may embolden—not Devils but Heathen nations to rise up in the day of judgment, and condemn those who trode in the paths of sin under the clear discovery of gospel-light. *Sodom and Gomorrah, the men of Nineveh, of Tyre, and of Sidon, will be swift witnesses against such in the great day of the Lord.*

THIS most alarming truth is often presented to view in the word of God; nor in vain. Ought it not to arouse and awake the most supine and secure? — To engage us to *trade with our Lord's Talents, and to occupy 'till he come*; remembering his de-

* John xv. 22, 24.

† John iii. 19.

claration, that *that servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes,—for unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required**.

BUT, though, in so many instances, *the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day*; yet there is one remarkable difference between the natural day, and the day of grace. In the natural world the sun sets, and darkness advances towards evening; but, in the spiritual world, the evening of the aged and experienced Christian is often so favoured with the irradiating beams of the sun of Righteousness, and the smiles of God's reconciled countenance as to become more comfortable and glorious than his morning. Though in the course of his pilgrimage he may be suffered to *walk in darkness*, yet there is no season in which he shall find the horror of night surround him; for as he stays himself upon the Lord, so the Lord will be a light unto him. Yea, when he is called to enter, and travel *through the valley*

* Luke xii. 47, 48.

of the shadow of death, it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light. The nearer he gets to the celestial palace, and the more the eye of his faith contemplates the lustre of its dazzling beauties, the more is his spiritual eye-sight strengthened and improved.

THIS is the happiness of many of God's children; and thus, after the evening of their departure, they shall again arise in the morning of the resurrection, with renewed splendor, and adorned with unfulfilled beauty.

THE night of death, as it implies no interruption or cessation of the vital powers of the soul, so neither of the light and joy of those who die in the Lord. For they go from a land where, at best, they see but darkly, to that world where the Lord is its light and glory: where they shall *see, not as through a glass darkly, but then face to face*: where God, the best of Beings, and the most amiable of objects, is known as he is. This state of light and glory awaiting Believers in heaven, may fitly be called *the perfect day*. Their faces shall be for ever

turned towards the Sun of Righteousness, shining upon them in his unvailed glory; and their felicity shall be for ever new. There will be no weariness of spirit, no loathing of the objects to be beholden, as was the case here where every thing was in its nature unsatisfying, and far below the desires of the immortal soul. As the redeemed shall, in heaven, be perfectly blessed in the Lord, so for ever and for ever. Their light, life, and joy shall know no end, nor shall the Sun ever go down upon them.

I N F E R E N C E S.

1. HAVE *the just* a path prescribed to them to walk in? Then we infer, that all who are living to themselves, to the flesh, and without a regard to God's Law, are yet wanderers from this heavenly path, and strangers to the character in my text. If made evangelically righteous, in the manner we have described, a regard to justice will discover itself in the whole of your deportment. You will not satisfy yourselves with attending to the duties of one table of the law merely, but you will testify a regard

gard to God and his glory, by making the whole law the rule of your conduct; by *adorning the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things;—denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;* by running in the ways of his commandments, and walking in the narrow path which leadeth unto life.

2. Is this path compared to light? Then you who contentedly walk on in darkness, and are ignorant of Christ, his mediation, atonement, righteousness, covenant, and benefits, can have no pretence to your being in the path to heaven. All that are walking in this way have their eyes opened to see the evil of sin, and the danger of their condition, while continuing strangers to Christ, and a saving acquaintance with him. All the true and saving light which the righteous possess, is derived from the Sun of Righteousness. If we imagine, therefore, that the light of natural reason, or of the world's philosophy, is sufficient, this discovers that we are yet in darkness, and that our souls are blinded to the important and

saving discoveries of the gospel. How just will their condemnation be who love darkness rather than light! How awful their doom! For if God is just in judging and condemning those who sin without the written law, how much more in punishing those who wilfully shut their eyes against the clear discoveries of gospel light!

3. *If the path of the just be as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day*; let such as profess to know and to walk in the ways of God, enquire whether they are advancing forwards—and growing in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ? To be at a stand is a most unpromising sign; whereas there cannot be a more infallible sign of the reality of grace, than the desire of the soul to press forwards in the path to heaven, and to have an experience of the lively exercise of the graces of God's spirit in his soul.—But let not the weak christian draw a hasty and harsh conclusion against himself: for as light proceeds gradually and imperceptibly, so doth grace in the soul. If but one ray of saving truth hath as yet beamed in upon thy soul, thou

thou hast abundant cause for comfort and thankfulness. If thou hast faith—weak and small, as a grain of mustard-seed, though it may not free thee from doubts, yet it may bear thee up against despondency, excite thee to look unto the Lord that he would increase thy faith, and ascertain the reality of a good work of grace begun on thy soul.

BUT farther:—if the path of the just shine more and more unto the perfect day, let none suppose that they have *already attained, either are already perfect; counting not themselves to have apprehended, but, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, let them press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus**: and be going from grace to grace, from one degree of strength to another, 'till they shall at last appear in Zion before God.

TO CONCLUDE:—if the just walk in the path which leads to heaven, what hope of

* Phil. iii. 13, 14, 15.

heaven dare such to entertain who are turning their backs on the paths of righteousness, and running in the ways of ungodliness, the end whereof is death? The way of peace ungodly sinners know not—destruction and misery are in all are their ways. Oh then, *give glory to the Lord God before your feet stumble on the dark mountains, and the years and days draw nigh when you shall say, that you have no pleasure in them!*

3 NO 63

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S E R M O N X V .

SONG of SOLOMON V. 16.

*This is my friend.—*

FEW names are more frequently pronounced than that of friend : and yet but few characters are more difficult to be found. When the infallible marks of true friendship are ascertained, many who assume the sacred name, will be found not to deserve it. Happy is he who hath found a wife, a sincere, and a faithful friend : such a blessing falls not to the lot of all. But if we desire to see friendship in the highest perfection, 'tis in another soil that it flourishes ; it is a plant of heavenly growth ; 'tis beyond the skies we find the incomparable friend who is born for us in our adversity, and who sticketh closer than a Brother. This friend is Jesus Christ. His character
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is described, and his love celebrated in the divine song from which the words of the text are taken. Some profane persons have spoken against this Book, but its divine inspiration has been ably vindicated, and the comforts that it contains, have been tasted with peculiar relish by devout souls in every age of the Church. In further discoursing to you from the words, I shall observe the following method.

I. POINT out to you the friendship that Jesus Christ has displayed towards us.

II. ENQUIRE what returns his friendship demands from us. And

III. DEDUCE some Inferences from the subject.

I. I SHALL point out to you the friendship that Jesus Christ has displayed towards us. The following qualities will be found united in it in the highest degree.

1. IT is pure and disinterested. There is not in it the smallest mixture of selfishness
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or sordid interest. *For what doth it profit him, if we be righteous. Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise, may be profitable unto himself?* His friendship did not proceed from the hope of recovering something again, or of being recompensed by us. He was animated solely by the pleasure of doing good, and rendering his people happy. Such friendships are not to be met with upon earth, for all connections of this nature originate in some amiable qualities of the object real or supposed. As for the combinations that sometimes take place among wicked men who are partners in iniquity, it would disgrace the sacred name of friendship to apply it to them. If the original cause of Christ's friendship for us be enquired into, it will be found to arise wholly from his goodness and compassion. There were no amiable qualities in us to attract his regard. See our salvation described in Ezek. xvi by our friend himself, ver. 5, 6. *Thou wast cast out in the open field, to the loathing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born. And when I passed by thee and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, live;*

live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, live. Such Christ finds men, but he makes them amiable. In ordinary instances friends are chosen from such as never have offended: but the friends whom Christ has chosen, were at the time of his choice, enemies to him in their minds by wicked works.

2. It is steady and constant. His friendship is like himself, the same yesterday, to-day and for ever. Seldom is this quality to be found on earth. The heart that glows to-day with all the ardour of friendship, by-and-by grows lukewarm, and at last is frozen into cold indifference. Sometimes old friendships degenerate into bitter enmities; and the most unrelenting quarrels take place. But if the list of the friends of Christ that is kept on high be examined, there will be found no blots, no names erased. Having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them unto the end. He may indeed suspend for a time the wonted intimations of his love: and clouds may separate from us those beams which this sun that never sets, does always shed abroad. But his heart is
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always warm with love to his people, and his friendship without intermission. Indeed, he has told us, in Pf. lxxxix. 30.—*That if his children forsake his law, and walk not in his judgments; if they break his statutes and keep not his commandments, he will visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquities with stripes. Nevertheless his loving-kindness he will not utterly take from them, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail. His covenant will he not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his lips.* And in another place he says, *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten*, Rev. iii. 19. But does this conduct argue want of love. By no means. It shews his friendship to be of the noblest kind, and that instead of taking off his affection on account of their improper conduct, he will reform and correct what is amiss, that his friendship may endure for ever. How much and how justly do we value this steadiness of friendship, if found in a fellow-creature! Should it not be more extolled when found in the highest degree of perfection in one who is infinitely above us? Against the variation of human friendship we have no absolute security. But we have the promise and the
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oath of the unchangeable God, that the friendship of Christ shall endure for ever, and his friendship will make the objects of it eternally blessed in the presence of God, where there is fulness of joy, and at his right hand where there are pleasures for evermore.

3. HE stoops to a level with the objects of his friendship. He despised not nor abhorred their distressed state. As his friends were partakers of flesh and blood he himself also took part of the same: and to him we may with the greatest propriety apply, Isa. lvii. 15. *Though he be the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, who dwelleth in the high and holy place, yet with that man does he stoop to dwell, who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.* Though the heavens, even the heaven of heavens were his abode, yet he disdained not the manger nor the cottage. Tho' the celestial songs of adoring Seraphims were directed to his praise, he refused not to be born in a stable amidst the lowing of the herd. He who was the heir
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of all things, and unspeakably rich, became poor and needy for his friends. Nor did this happen because he was unacquainted with our state. No, he did not find us more indigent or distressed than he knew us to be, nor did he ever murmur when he saw the utmost bounds of human wretchedness. No change of sentiment was inspired by all the ingratitude that he felt.

4. HE makes them free and liberal partakers of his unsearchable riches. He that seeth his brother in need, and shutteth his bowels of compassion, how dwelleth the love of God in him. That friendship no wife resembles Christ's; for he communicates abundantly to supply his peoples wants. He declined judging in a cause concerning an inheritance, when an appeal was made to him. But from his own inheritance, what a glorious distribution he has made? Can the annals of the world furnish an instance of a similar kind? He took our poverty, and imparted to us his unsearchable riches. He bore our sins; and gave us in exchange his perfect righteousness. He was a curse for us; and he communicates to

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us his blessing. He made himself chargeable with our debts ; and he bestows upon us fine gold tried in the fire. He was stripped naked ; that from his nakedness we might receive the garments of salvation. He was an hungred ; that he might give to us the bread of life. He was beaten ; that by his stripes we might be healed. He was in prison and bound ; thence we derive the liberty of the sons of God. He endured shame, that from him we might receive immortal honour. He was made a spectacle to Angels and to men, that he might make us appear before Angels at last and like unto them. He wore a crown of thorns which we deserved ; that he might give to us a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

5. HE sympathises with his friends in the sufferings that they endure. In all their afflictions he is afflicted, and in their troubles he is grieved. The head is not more affected with an injury received by any member of the body, than Christ is with the distresses of his people : for he looks upon them as the members of his body, his flesh, and his bones. When Saul of old made havock of the Church and wasted it,

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Jesus as feeling himself hurt by the injury done to his disciples, says to him, *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* If his friends be burdened he feels the weight: nor is his sympathy less since his exaltation. Though raised far above principalities and powers, and every name that is named in heaven or in earth, he is not forgetful of his suffering servants here, but has as tender a sympathy for them as when he dwelt here below. The fiery furnace did not separate between him and his friends: he was with them there. *Did we not,* says Nebuchadnezzar, *cast three men bound into the midst of the fire. Lo, I see four men loose walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.*

THOUGH this were an uncommon sight, the same thing for substance happens still. Wherever his friends suffer, there is he present with them to sympathize with them, and to support them. When the martyrs were in the flames, Jesus was with them to strengthen them, and to fill their hearts with joy; and though invisible to the surround-

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ing multitudes was as really present to preserve the souls of his people from hurt, as when the King of Babylon beheld them in the furnace.—In what record, in what leaf or page was it ever found written, that Christ forsook his people in adversity? He never did; and if every Christian was called to subscribe this, he could assert it with heart and hand. Christ and his people are one; not only one and indissoluble in law as he is their surety; but also one in spirit, and by a vital union. He is that friend born for adversity, for aid in man's deplorable adversity, and his generous friendship always shines brightest amidst his people's distress.

6. He communicates to them his secrets. The secret of the Lord Jesus is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant. How clear and affecting a discovery is made to them of the mystery that was hidden from ages and from generations, which none of the Princes of this world knew, which is hidden from the wise and prudent, but is revealed even unto those that are babes in Christ. How wonderful an insight

insight into the doctrines of the gospel have many unlettered disciples of Jesus had. They are more eagle-eyed used in this respect, than the wisest Philosophers. How close the intimacy between Christ and the believer. It is kept up and increased from day to day, by the reading of the word and prayer. In these exercises Christ makes himself known to his people, as he does not unto the world, and manifests his glory. They in prayer unbosom themselves to him, and lay open their whole heart. Christ set his people an example in this respect. He spent whole nights in prayer to God at a distance from the habitations of men. Had any human ear been permitted to listen, what an insight into futurity, would have been gained, how distinct an enumeration and the trials of his people, how full and feeling a representation of what shall befall his Church till he come again?

7. HE delights in their company. He deigns to solicit their visits, and holds pleasing intercourse with them. *Truly, our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.* The child runs not more

naturally to its mother, than the Christian to his friend. When excluded from the society of their fellow creatures, they have found his presence sweet. When shut up in loathsome and gloomy dungeons, where earthly acquaintance would have shuddered at the thoughts of entering, the visits and consolations of their Redeemer have been so delightful as to over-power all painful sensations within their breast. None without feeling can conceive what intimate access he has to the souls of his people. So desirous is he of their company, that tho' shut out 'till his locks are wet with the dew of the night, when the heart is opened to him, he comes in, and brings along with him peace and joy. When the souls of his people are overwhelmed with sorrow, and they are passing through the water, or through the fire, he hastens to them and says, *Be of good cheer: fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed for I am your friend, I will strengthen you, yea, I will help you, yea, I will uphold you with the right-hand of my righteousness.* Hence it is, that the followers of Jesus, amidst the greatest distress, encourage themselves in the Lord.

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ONCE more Christ testifies his friendship by taking his people to dwell with him in that state of glory to which he is exalted. By nature they are children of wrath, by sin they forfeited every blessing, and were exposed to eternal misery. But Christ, their best friend by his death, delivered them from the wrath to come and purchased eternal redemption for them. He is now gone to prepare for them the mansion that he purchased. He sends down his spirit to make them meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. When the earthly house of this Tabernacle is dissolved, he admits the soul to the possession of an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens: there his people are for ever with him to behold his glory, and are themselves made partakers of it; and at the resurrection of the dead he changes the vile body which was thrown into the grave, and makes it like unto his own glorious body, by that working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself. Such is the consummation of the friendship of Christ to his people. I proceed

II. To enquire what returns this friendship demands from us.

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1. **THOUGH** our goodness cannot benefit Christ, yet it is highly proper to have the deepest impressions of his friendship, and to say as in Ps. cxvi. 9. *I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.* There is no one that believes himself redeemed by Jesus Christ, but must be sensible that he owes him infinitely more than he shall ever be able to pay, and that eternity cannot discharge the debt. His mind will often be filled with fear lest he should act ungratefully, and inconsistently with his character as the friend of Christ, and oblige Jesus to say to him, *Is this thy love to thy friend.* How will it sting an ingenuous mind, when there is reason to make this reflection: *I have sinned not against an enemy, but against my best friend who loved me, and gave himself for me.* Much grief did Peter feel for denying his Lord. And tho' Christ spoke peace to him, he found it not so easy to speak peace to himself. Thus too will it be with you, if like him you be undutiful to your best friend. Watch and pray therefore, that ye enter not into temptation. Have respect unto all his Commandments; walk as he also walked; follow the example
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he has set before you, and remember what he said unto his disciples : *If ye love me keep my Commandments.* If you wish from day to day to hear conscience whispering peace, pay a sacred regard to the rule of friendship ; for though obedience be not the procuring cause of this friendship, yet when the friendship is cemented ; by the law of liberty obedience is required, and necessary and without it the friendship cannot subsist.

2. CHRIST's friendship demands a tender concern for his cause and interest. Tho' he be exalted at the right-hand of God, part of the fruit of the travail of his soul is on earth. He has a Church which he bought with his precious blood. It is infinitely dear to him. The prosperity of it lies near his heart, and he requires it as a duty of all his friends, that they should do every thing in their power to promote its welfare. The true friends of Christ have the same mind in them that was in him. They are deeply concerned for the interests of true religion : zeal for God's house is a fire constantly burning within their breasts. They pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Rivers of waters

ters run down their eyes, because men keep not God's law: and it is their great endeavour that Jesus may be more known and loved. This testimony of friendship they show. This Christ requires, and he has in every age used the instrumentality of his friends, their head, their tongues, their hands, their feet to promote the welfare of his Church; and he allows them the profit, reserving nothing to himself but the glory.

3. THE friendship of Christ demands that if there be any of his friends to whom it can be in any measure repaid, it should be done. David, who was so sensible of Jonathan's friendship, and who sought for Mephibolheth to repay the kindness to him, sets before us a commendable pattern here. If you wish, you may do likewise, for Christ has brethren and sister's sons, and daughters, and you may see him go about in them. Though they be his kindred, many of them are mean, poor, despised, and accounted as the off-scouring of all things, but of whom the world is not worthy. They often hunger and thirst, and he has deputed them to receive the tokens of the affection of his friends,

friends, and he has so ordered their lot on purpose that his friends in prosperity might not sigh in vain for opportunities of testifying their affection to him, but might have the poor always with them. In this way does your Lord require you to testify your affection for him.

4. If there be any memorial by which his person and friendship are brought to mind, it should be highly valued. How we prize the gift of a parent, of a friend deceased, and disdain the thoughts of putting it up to sale, though we could obtain far more than its intrinsic worth: It was we say, *my Father's dying token*. To furnish his friends with something of this nature, behold Christ has left one token of his love, and to accommodate it to the law of liberty, he has given gratitude much to do: *As oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup ye do shew the Lord's death till he come*. I know no other memorial that bears the stamp of Christ's institution, but this, and this is the Christian's particular badge. Observance of this is one of the distinguishing marks by which the follower of Jesus may

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be known. Does he deserve to rank among the friends of Christ who is ashamed to wear this badge, or devoutly to regard this memorial? I now conclude,

III. WITH deducing some Inferences from the subject.

1. How much is the human nature dignified by this honourable connection. Surely we ought not to over-rate all the boasted distinctions among men. Here is the road to honour to pleasure and to profit, the patent of most exalted nobility, an introduction to the most distinguished connections, an affinity, not with the excellent ones of the earth, but the Lord of heaven.

2. NONE after this can complain of being friendless. Perhaps your father and mother are taken from you by death: brothers and sisters may also be laid in the dust; the friends of your youth may be gone before into eternity, and you may be left solitary in the midst of the earth: but tho' deprived of all social intercourse with men, you have one friend who ever lives,
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and is ever kind : He changes not. Many happy souls shut out from all earthly connections, solace themselves in the friendship of Jesus Christ. No hours are so joyful as those they spend in communion with their Saviour.

3. WHAT a glorious revolution has the mediation of Christ brought about in our world ! Millions were enemies to God and Christ : he has made them friends. No enmity was ever more deeply rooted than man's to God. O how generous the love of Christ which he manifested in his life and at his death ! And glorious are its effects. For millions of enemies are become friends, and the steadiest and sincerest friends. Many waters cannot quench their love, neither can the floods drown it. He has thousands of times shown its strength on the rack and in the flames.

How great the power of that grace which has made so wonderful a change. It has melted the hardest hearts : it has subdued most obstinate rebels : it has conquered the most deep-rooted enmity of the human heart. None have reason to despair. Tho' enemies

enemies you may be reconciled: what has been so often accomplished already, may again take place.

4. YE that are friends of Christ demean yourselves towards him in a proper manner. Testify your relation to him by wearing that badge which he hath appointed, and say openly in the face of the world: *I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, &c.* At the same time let your practice be suitable to your profession, and adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour by a life and conversation becoming the Gospel.

If ye be the friends of Christ then ye must not be conformed to the world, nor walk according to the course of it, nor set your hearts upon it: *for ye cannot serve God and Mammon.* If the friends of Christ, ye must crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, and lead a life of humility, meekness and self-denial, and follow the steps of Christ, 'till he come and take you to dwell in that world where he is, that ye may behold his glory, and for ever rejoice in his friendship and love. AMEN.

3 NO 63

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